

T H E
ENGLISH PREACHER.

V O L. VIII.



T H E
ENGLISH PREACHER:
O R,
S E R M O N S
ON THE PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS OF
RELIGION AND MORALITY,
SELECTED, REVISED, AND ABRIDGED FROM
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S E R M O N I.

AGAINST HYPOCRISY IN RELIGION.

2 TIMOTHY III. 5.

*Having a form of godliness, but denying
the power thereof.*

THE Apostle, in these words, distinguishes two things in religion, which do not, but ought always to go together; the shew and pretence of religion, and the life and power of it. He condemns neither, but blames the separating of them. The latter indeed cannot be without the first; for
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wherever religion really is, there will be some appearance of it : but the former may be, and often is, without the latter. Men may make a great shew of religion, and yet be very destitute of the power of it. And such were those persons the Apostle describes in the text; they were guilty of the greatest faults and vices in their lives, but thought to cloak all these by an outward shew and appearance of godliness : “ Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.”

There are several characters by which the man who hath only a form of godliness but denieth the power thereof, is distinguished.

First; He hath only a form of godliness, who minds merely the external part of religion, without any inward sense of it. He that worships and serves God outwardly, but hath no inward reverence and esteem for him; who cares not, so the work be done, and the duty performed, with what heart and affection he does it. This is a mere carcass of religion, which is so far from being pleasing to God, that it is highly offensive to him; for though it be outwardly an honour done to God, yet really and in truth it is a contempt of him. And

And yet it is to be feared, that this is a religion which many in the world chuse, and content themselves with. They can serve God an hour together, and mention his name a hundred times, without ever thinking of him, or being affected with the business they are about. But “God is a spirit; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.” “In spirit and in truth;” in opposition to a mere bodily service, and external shew of devotion. God, who is a spirit, must be worshipped with our spirits. He expects from reasonable creatures a reasonable service; and that service only is reasonable, which is dictated by our understandings, and accompanied with our hearts and affections: and to worship him otherwise, is to offer a sacrifice without a heart; it is “to offer the lame and the blind in sacrifice,” which would be an affront to our governor, much more to the great King of the world. Whatever we do in the service of God, we must “do it heartily as to the Lord,” because he is “the searcher of hearts, and all things are open, and naked to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

Farther; He hath only a form of godliness, who useth only the means of religion, without regard to the end and effect of them. A man may exercise his understanding in the service of God, and his heart may be touched, and his affections moved in prayer, and at the hearing of God's word, and the receiving of the sacrament, and yet this may be but a form of religion, if it go no farther. If we do not forsake those sins we confess to God, and daily beg the pardon of; if we do not truly and heartily endeavour that we may live godly and righteous and sober lives, as well as pray that we may do so; if the counsels and directions of God's word have not an influence upon our lives; if we be not awed by the threatnings of it to leave our sins, and encouraged by the promises of it to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God;" we use the means of religion to no purpose, and we discredit the institutions of God, because we make no proficiency under them. We are just like the disciples of those formal professors of religion, whom the Apostle describes after the text, who are "ever
"learn-

“learning, but never able to come to the
“knowledge of the truth.” It seems
they used the means of instruction, and
continued to use them, “they were ever
learning;” but all this while they were
under the dominion of sin, and the pow-
er of their lusts; “they were laden with
sin, and led away with divers lusts,” and
so they never attained to that which the
Apostle calls “the knowledge of the
truth,” that is, such a knowledge of the
doctrine of Christ, as is accompanied with
a suitable practice, according to that of
our Saviour, “If ye continue in my
“word,” that is, if ye practise my doc-
trine, “then are ye my disciples indeed,
“and ye shall know the truth, and the
“truth shall make you free.” Then men
come to the knowledge of the truth,
when it frees them from the slavery of
sin. If our knowledge have not this ef-
fect, it signifies nothing, and does not
deserve the name of knowledge, because
we know nothing in religion, as we ought
to know. St. John, speaking of the
knowledge of Christ, says, “Hereby do
“we know that we know him, if we
“keep his commandments. He that saith
“he knows him, and keepeth not his

“commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

In fine, he hath only a form of religion, who is grossly and knowingly defective in the practice of any part of it. And these are the persons whom the Apostle particularly intends to describe in the text: “they had a form of godliness, but denied the power of it.” Under the garb of religion, which they had put on, they were grossly faulty in their lives and practices, and materially defective in many of the essential duties of christianity; they were selfish and covetous, vain-glorious and despisers of others, calumniators and slanderers, undutiful to their superiors, and unthankful to those who had obliged them; fierce and ill-natured, treacherous and false to their word; persecutors of those who were good; impure and sensual; not that every one of them had all these vices; they are so many and gross, that no cloak of religion could have covered them; but the Apostle means, that among those who made an empty profession of religion, these vices were visible, some of them in one, and some in another; and the living in any one of these, or any other

other of the like nature, is inconsistent with christianity. The power of religion appears chiefly in the subduing of these lusts, and in the exercise and practice of those graces and virtues which are contrary to these. Here the very heart and life of religion lies, and these are the veins in which it runs; and if there be a failure in any of these main virtues of a christian life, it is a plain case, that we are destitute of the "power of religion," and do only make "a vain and empty shew of it." St. James instanceth, as one would think, in none of the grossest and most considerable of these, the government of our tongue; and yet he peremptorily determines, that the want of this virtue is enough to destroy all a man's other pretences to religion: "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceives his own heart; this man's religion is vain."

So that by the practice or neglect of these main virtues of a good life, every man may examine and judge himself. This is the rule which our Saviour gives to try the religion of men by; "ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men

“gather grapes of thorns, or figs of
 “thistles? Even so every good tree
 “bringeth forth good fruit: but a cor-
 “rupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A
 “good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit;
 “neither can a corrupt tree bring forth
 “good fruit. Wherefore by their fruits
 “ye shall know them.” The force of
 which reasoning is this, that every tree
 bringeth forth fruit according to its na-
 ture, and by the kind and quality of the
 fruit, you may certainly know what the
 tree is. So by the good or bad actions of
 men’s lives, you may know by what prin-
 ciple they are governed, whether the fear
 of God, or the love of sin bear sway in
 them; the course of their lives will dis-
 cover the bent and inclination of their
 minds, whatever shew and profession they
 make to the contrary. “By their fruits
 “ye shall know them. Not every one
 “that saith unto me, Lord, Lord,”—there
 is the profession of religion—“shall en-
 “ter into the kingdom of heaven: but
 “he that doth the will of my father
 “which is in heaven:” this is the pow-
 er of religion.

I would by no means encourage men
 to be over-censorious toward others, there
 is

is too much of that spirit already in the world: but it is not amiss that men should be strict and severe toward themselves. And I would to God men would bring themselves to this test, and examine the truth and sincerity of their religion, not by the leaves of an outward profession, but by the fruits it produceth in their lives. Every man that will but take the pains to look into himself, and to observe his own actions, may, by comparing the temper of his mind, and the general course of his life and practice, with the rules and precepts of religion, easily discern what power and efficacy religion hath on him. A man may as certainly know himself, and make as sure a judgment of his character and his condition this way, "as a tree is known "by its fruit." Therefore let us not flatter ourselves: for if we indulge any lust, or irregular passion in our souls, and do not endeavour to mortify and subdue it; if we allow ourselves in any vicious practice in our lives; we do but deceive ourselves with an opinion of our godliness, and whatever shew and appearance we may make of religion, we are certainly destitute of the power of it.

And the form of godliness, without the power, is insignificant to all the great ends and purposes of religion: it can neither secure the favour of God, the peace of our own minds, nor our future eternal happiness.

External devotion in prayer without a holy life, is but a rude and troublesome noise in the ear of the Almighty. "The prayer of the wicked" is so far from being accepted, that it "is an abomination to him." He does not love to be invoked by unhallowed lips, and to be praised by the workers of iniquity. Flattery is hateful to a wise man, much more to the infinitely wise God. He cannot endure that men should lift up "eyes" to him "that are full of adultery," and "hands filled with violence and oppression," and "tread his courts with feet ready to shed blood." It is an affront to God to be worshipped by evil-doers, and to see men diligent in reading his word, and attending to his law, who break it every day. "Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth, seeing thou hatest to be reformed, and castest
" my

“ my words behind thy back.” What God says of the sacrifices of the Jews, offered to him by “ a sinful people laden with iniquity,” may be applied to the worship of Christians who live wicked and licentious lives: “ To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations. Incense is an abomination unto me: the new moons, and sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons, and your appointed feasts my soul hateth, they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hand, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear. Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well.”

Another end of religion, is the peace and tranquillity of our own minds. And this is not to be attained upon true and lasting grounds, by any form of religion without the power of it. Men may delude themselves with some false peace, and make a hard shift to stop the loud and vehement clamours of their conscience; but the guilt of any vicious course of life will frequently recoil upon them, to disturb and interrupt their peace. For no man can knowingly live in the practice of any sin, but he must be guilty to himself; and whoever is guilty, hath received a secret sting into his heart, which is never to be taken out but by repentance, and a thorough reformation. God hath said it, and I doubt not but every sinner finds it true, "There is no peace to the wicked." Especially when such a man is seized upon by sickness, and approaches in his thoughts near to eternity, then his drowsy conscience awakes like a lion out of sleep, full of rage and fierceness, and all his false peace and comfort vanisheth. "For what is the hope of the hypocrite when God taketh away his soul?" It is, as Job elegantly expresses it, "like the spider's web," artificially wrought,

wrought, but miserably weak ; it can endure no stress, upon the least touch it breaks and vanisheth.

And this is no small disadvantage which a man that hath only the form of religion lies under, that in effect he loseth all the pleasure and satisfaction of religion ; or if he fancy any hope or comfort to himself, it is built upon a false foundation, which when it is tried will endure no shock. This is the comparison our Saviour useth in this very case. " Every one
" that heareth these sayings of mine, and
" doth them not," (that is, hath " a form
" of godliness without the power of it ")
" shall be likened to a foolish man, which
" built his house upon the sand ; and the
" rain descended, and the floods came,
" and the winds blew, and beat upon that
" house, and it fell, and great was the
" fall of it." But real and substantial religion is like " a house built upon a rock," which no tempest can overthrow. " Righteousness, saith Solomon, is an everlasting foundation ;" it is a continual spring of joy and peace. There is a certain unspeakable contentment and delight arising from a good conscience, and from the sincere discharge of our duty, which
a hy-

a hypocrite is a stranger to, and is never permitted to enjoy. Now what an uncomfortable thing is this, for a man to take the pains to seem to be religious, and yet to lose the real pleasure of religion!

Lastly, The great end of all religion is the saving of our souls. And this end a mere form of religion will certainly miss of. No external garb of religion will gain a man admission into heaven; there is no entering there in masquerade: no prayers will then avail, though ever so fervent and importunate. "Many will say in that day, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and yet he will bid them depart from him." Though we had heard Christ himself preach, and had received the blessed sacrament from him, yet this will not avail. So our Saviour tells us, "Then shall they begin to say, 'we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets;' and yet 'he will say unto them, 'I know you not whence you are.'"

It is not a pretence to inspiration, though it were justified by miraculous gifts, that will then stand us in stead. "Many will say in that day; Lord, Lord,

“ Lord, have we not prophesied in thy
“ name, and in thy name have cast out
“ devils, and in thy name done many
“ wonderful works ? ” And yet these
shall be rejected. What should be the
reason of all this severity ? Our Saviour
gives us a plain account of it ; because
they were “ workers of iniquity.” Under
all these several masks of religion, they
were wicked in their lives.

But I proceed to observe, that he who
has only the form of religion, not only
loses the chief advantages of it, but is li-
able to peculiar disadvantages.

He hath the trouble of making a shew
and appearance of religion, without the
real benefits of it. And it is no small
trouble to personate and act a part well,
it requires great art and attention, great
guard and caution. That which men are
prompted to by an inward principle, is
natural and easy, it is done with pleasure
and delight ; but whatever is artificial
and counterfeit, is stiff and forced. No
man can dissemble always ; one time or
other he will be surpris'd, and forget
himself, and let his mask fall. A form
of religion is a dry unpleasant thing,
and a continual burthen to him that as-
fumes

fumes it; and the more outwardly strict and holy he is, the more inwardly guilty must he be: his conscience never stings and galls him more, than when he is playing the hypocrite with God and men. Whereas a truly good man, when he employs himself in acts of religion, or justice, or charity, he doth it naturally, and hath a real satisfaction of mind in the doing of it, and if he were permitted to make his own choice, he would not do otherwise; but a hypocrite puts a force upon himself all the while, and acts against his nature and inclinations; every thing he does in religion goes against the grain, and because it is unnatural, must be uneasy: his outward conversation and demeanour is set, and formal, he does not move as he would, but as he must, and the secret propensions of his nature are under a continual restraint.

He hath indeed one advantage by his artificial garb, that he can more securely over-reach and defraud others by the shew of godliness, while men are not aware of his dissimulation. But this commonly does not last long, and only serves a man for a few turns; and when it is discovered, the man is lost, and no one will trust him.

him. But suppose he could serve himself of religion this way for some considerable time, where is the advantage? It amounts to no more than this, that he hath the opportunity of being a greater sinner, of making himself more miserable, and “treasuring up to himself” more “wrath against the day of wrath.” So that he pays dear for all this in the final issue, as well as in the way. He spends many a tedious hour in the service of God, and the exercise of religion; more it may be than many do, who save their souls, and get to heaven. For as to the external part of religion, a hypocrite must do all that which a truly religious man does; he must frequent the church, and make as much shew of devotion as the best; nay, perhaps prays more, and fasts oftener, and is more busy, and makes a greater stir in the outward part of religion, than the sincere Christian: for being conscious to himself of his own hypocrisy and insincerity in religion, he thinks himself obliged outwardly to overact it in unseasonable and superstitious observances, and in all other arts of affected devotion. And when he goes abroad into the world, he is forced to lay great restraints

straints upon himself, and to be continually gathering his cloak about him, as being afraid lest any body should spy what is under it. So much more troublesome it is for any man to seem to be religious, than to be so indeed.

Nay, a mere form of religion does upon some accounts bring a man under a heavier sentence, than if he were openly profane and irreligious. He that makes a shew of religion, flatters God, but all the while acts and designs against him: whereas the profane man deals plainly, and though he be a monstrous and unnatural rebel, yet he is a fair and open enemy: and the kisses of a false friend are more hateful than the wounds of an open enemy. Upon this account it is that our Saviour denounceth so many severe woes against the scribes and pharisees, because they were wicked under a shew of religion. "Wo unto you scribes and pharisees, hypocrites." And when he would set forth the severity of the Lord against "the evil servant," he expresseth it thus, "he shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth:" as if the punishment

nishment of hypocrites, were the rule and standard of the severest punishment. "He shall appoint him his portion with the hypocrites."

The proper application of what hath been said is to persuade men to mind the power, and life, and substance of religion. It was said in commendation of Socrates, the best of philosophers, that he brought down philosophy from heaven to earth, that is, from contemplation to practice, and from being an art of talking and disputing to be an art of living. This is the great end and scope, to which all discourses of religion ought to be levelled. It was a good saying of an ancient, I hate men that are inactive in their lives, and philosophers in their opinions. Christianity is the best philosophy, and the most perfect institution of life that ever the world was acquainted with; and therefore it is much more odious to see men christians, in their profession, and faulty and vicious in their lives; because the very design of the christian religion is to give men a perfect and plain law and rule of life, and to enforce this law by the most powerful and prevailing arguments. So that as Tully
says

says concerning the philosopher who lived a bad life, that he was utterly inexcusable, "because he failed in that wherein he pretended to be a master, and while he professed to have an art of living better than other men, he offended and miscarried in his life:" all defects in the practice of the virtues of a good life, may with much more reason and justice be condemned in christians, in those "who have learned Christ, who have heard him and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus;" in those who are blessed with the clearest and most perfect revelation which ever God made to the world, the holiest and most reasonable religion, which furnisheth us with the best counsels and directions, the most prevalent motives and arguments, and the greatest helps and advantages to a good life; a religion plain and simple, that hath less of outward form and pomp, and more of substance and reality, than any religion which ever was known in the world.

Let this "grace of God, then, which hath appeared unto all men, teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world." S E R-

S E R M O N II.

THE TERRORS OF CONSCIENCE.

MATTHEW XIV. 1, 2, 3.

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist, he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.

“**T**HE wicked, says the prophet,
“ are like the troubled sea, when
“ it cannot rest, whose waters cast up
“ mire and dirt.” That is, men of flagitious lives are subject to great uneasiness :

ness: whatever calm and repose of mind they may seem for a season to enjoy, yet anon, a quick and pungent sense of guilt, awakened by some accident, rises like a whirlwind, ruffles and disquiets them throughout, and turns up to open view, from the very bottom of their consciences, all the impurity which had settled itself there. A truth, of which there is not, perhaps, in the whole scripture, a more pertinent and lively instance, than that which the passage I have read from the Evangelist sets before us. The crying guilt of John the Baptist's blood sat but ill, no doubt, on the conscience of Herod, from the moment of his spilling it. However, his inward anguish and remorse was stifled and kept under for a time, by the splendor and luxury in which he lived, until he heard of the fame of Jesus; and then his heart smote him, at the remembrance of the inhuman treatment he had given to such another just and good man; and wrung from him a confession of what he felt, by what he uttered on that occasion. "He said
"unto his servants, This is John the
"Baptist! He is risen from the dead!
"and therefore mighty works do shew
"forth

“forth themselves in him.” There could not be a wilder imagination than this, or one which could more betray the agony and confusion of thought, under which he laboured. He had often heard John the Baptist preach, and must have known that the drift of all his sermons was, to prepare the Jews for the reception of a prophet, “mightier than he,” and “whose shoes he was not worthy to bear.” Upon the arrival of that prophet, soon afterwards, Herod’s frightened conscience gives him no leisure to recollect what his messenger had said; but immediately suggests to him, that this was the murdered Baptist himself! Herod, as appears from history, was, though circumcised, little better than a heathen in his principles and practices; or, if sincerely a Jew, was, at most, but of the sect of the Sadducees, who said, “there was no resurrection;” and yet, under the present pangs and terrors of his guilt, he imagines that John was “risen from the dead,” on purpose to reprove him. It was the Baptist’s distinguishing character, that he “did no miracles,” nor pretended to the power of doing them; and yet even from hence the disturbed
mind

mind of Herod concludes, that it must be he, because "mighty works did shew
"forth themselves in him." And so great was his consternation and surprise, that it broke out before those, who should least have been witnesses of it: for he whispers not his guilty fears to a bosom friend, to the partner of his crime, and of his bed; but forgets his high state and character, and declares them to his very servants. Surely nothing can be more just and apposite than the allusion of the prophet, in respect to this wicked Tetrarch; he is "like the troubled sea, "when it cannot rest, whose waters cast "up mire and dirt." And such is every one, that sins with a high hand, against the clear light of his conscience: although he may resist the checks of it at first, yet he will be sure to feel the lashes and reproaches of it afterwards. The avenging principle within us will certainly do its duty, upon any eminent breach of ours; and make every flagrant act of wickedness, even in this life, a punishment to itself.

With this general proposition the particular instance of the text, duly opened and considered, will furnish us: and this
propo-

proposition therefore I now purpose to handle and enforce; and, in order to fix a due, lively, and lasting sense of it upon our minds, I shall, in what follows, consider conscience, not as a mere intellectual light, or informing faculty, which directs, admonishes, and influences us, in what we are to do; but as it is the power by which we reflect on what we have done; and is, by that means, the source and cause of all that joy, or dejection of mind, of those internal sensations, if I may so speak, of pleasure or pain, which attend the practice of great virtues or great vices; and begin that heaven, or that hell in us here, which will be our portion hereafter.

That guilt and anguish are inseparable, and that the punishment of a man's sin begins always from himself, and from his own reflections, is a truth every where supposed, appealed to, and inculcated in scripture. In relation to this office of conscience it is, that the inspired writers speak of it (in terms borrowed from the solemnities of human judicatories) as bearing witness against us, as accusing, or excusing, judging, and condemning us. And the proph-

phet therefore adds this woe to the other menaces, which he had denounced on a disobedient and profligate people, that “their own wickedness should correct them, and their backsliding should re-
“prove them:” a correction so severe and terrible, that Solomon balancing the outward afflictions of life, and bodily pains, with the inward regrets and torments of a guilty mind, pronounces the former of these to be light and tolerable in comparison of the latter: “The spirit
“of a man, says he, will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who
“can bear?” Isaiah describes the dismal reflections, and foreboding thoughts that harbour in such a breast, after this manner: “The sinners of Sion are afraid,
“fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites: who shall dwell with devouring
“flames? who shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” But no part of scripture gives us so lively an account of this inward scene of dejection and horror, as the psalms of penitent David: in one of them, particularly, he thus complains: “Mine iniquities are gone over my head,
“as an heavy burthen; they are too
“heavy for me. I am feeble and sore
“bro-

“ broken, I have roared, by reason of
 “ the disquietness of my heart. I am
 “ troubled, I am bowed down greatly ;
 “ I go mourning all the day long. My
 “ heart panteth, my strength faileth me ;
 “ and as for the light of mine eyes, it is
 “ also gone from me. For thine arrows
 “ stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth
 “ me fore : there is no soundness in my
 “ flesh, because of thine anger ; neither
 “ is there any rest in my bones, because
 “ of my sin.”

This is the expressive language of scripture, when it would represent to us the disorders and uneasiness of a guilty self-condemning mind.

And there is nothing in these representations particular to the times and persons, to which they relate ; nothing but what happens alike to all men in like cases ; and is the genuine and necessary result of offending against the light of our consciences. Nor is it possible indeed, in the nature of the thing, that matters should be otherwise. It is the way, in which guilt doth and must always operate. For moral evil can no more be committed, than natural evil can be suffered, without anguish and disquiet :

whatever doth violence to the plain dictates of our reason concerning virtue and vice, duty and sin, will as certainly discompose and afflict our thoughts, as a wound will raise a smart in the flesh that receives it. Good and evil, whether natural or moral, are but other words for pleasure and pain, delight and uneasiness: at least, though they may be distinguished in the notion, yet are they not to be separated in reality; but the one of them, wherever it is, will constantly and uniformly excite and produce the other. Pain and pleasure are the springs of all human actions, the great engines, by which the wise Author of our nature governs and steers them to the purposes, for which he ordained them. By these, annexed to the perception of good and evil, he inclines us powerfully to pursue the one, and to avoid the other; to pursue natural good, and to avoid natural evil, by delightful or uneasy sensations, that immediately affect the body; to pursue moral good, and to avoid moral evil, by pleasing or painful impressions made on the mind. From hence it is, that we so readily choose or refuse, do or forbear every thing that is profitable or hurtful
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to us, and requisite to preserve or perfect our beings. And because it is an end of far greater importance, and more worthy of our all-wise Creator's care, to secure our moral, than our natural perfection; therefore he hath made the pleasures and pains, subservient to this purpose, more extensive and durable; so that the inward complacence we find in acting reasonably and virtuously, and the disquiet we feel from vicious choices and pursuits, is protracted beyond the acts themselves, from whence it arose; and renewed often upon our souls, by distant reflections; whereas the pleasures and pains, attending the perceptions of natural good and evil, are bounded within a narrower compass, and do seldom stay long, or return with any force upon the mind, after a removal of the objects that occasioned them.

Hence then the satisfactions, or stings of conscience severally arise: they are the sanctions, as it were, and enforcements of that eternal law of good and evil, to which we are subjected; the natural rewards and punishments originally annexed to the observance, or breach of that law by the great lawgiver; and

which being thus joined by God himself, can scarcely by any arts, endeavours, or practices of men be put asunder. The prophet therefore explains good and evil, by sweet and bitter. "Woe be to them, says he, that call evil "good, and good evil! that put bitter for "sweet, and sweet for bitter!" Implying, that the former of these do as naturally and sensibly affect the soul, as the latter do the palate; and leave as grateful, or displeasing a relish behind them.

But there is no need of arguments to evince this truth; the universal experience and feelings of mankind bear witness to it. For say, did ever any of you break the power of a darling lust, resist a pressing temptation, or perform any act of a conspicuous and distinguishing virtue, but that you found it soon turn to account to you? Did not your minds swell with a secret satisfaction, at the moment when you were doing it? and was not the reflection upon it afterwards always sweet and refreshing; "health to your "navel, and marrow to your bones?" On the contrary, did you ever indulge a criminal appetite, or allow yourself deliberately

berately in any practice which you knew to be unlawful, but that you felt an inward struggle, and strong reluctance of mind before the attempt, and bitter pangs of remorse attending it? Though no eye saw what you did, and you were sure that no mortal could discover it; did not shame and confusion secretly lay hold of you? Was not your own conscience instead of a thousand witnesses to you? Did it not "plead with you face to face," as it were, and upbraid you with your backslidings?

Libertines, who set up for freedom of thought, and for disengaging themselves from the prejudices of education and superstitious opinions, may pretend to dispute this truth, and perhaps, in the gaiety of their hearts, may venture even to deride it: but they cannot, however, get rid of their inward convictions of it; they must feel it sometimes, though they will not own it. There is no possibility of reasoning ourselves out of our own experience, or of laughing down a principle woven so closely into the make and frame of our natures. Notwithstanding our endeavours to conceal and stifle it, it will break out sometimes, and discover itself

to a careful observer, through all our pretences and disguises ; for even “ in “ the midst of such laughter, the heart “ is sorrowful : ” and as the beginning of that mirth is folly, so the end of it is always heaviness.

Look upon one of these men, who would be thought to have made his ill practices and ill principles perfectly consistent ; to have shaken off all regard to the dictates of his own mind concerning good and evil, and to have gotten above the reproofs of his conscience ; and you will find a thousand things, in his actions and discourses, testifying against him, that “ he deceiveth himself, ” and that “ the truth is not in him. ” If he be indeed, as he pretends, at ease in his enjoyments, from whence come those disorders and inequalities in his life and conduct ; those vicissitudes of good and bad humour, mirth and thoughtfulness ; that perpetual pursuit of little, mean, insipid amusements ; that restless desire of changing the scene, and the objects of his pleasure ; those sudden eruptions of passions and rage upon the least disappointments ? Certainly, all is not right within ; or else there would be a greater calm, and serenity

nity without : if his mind were not in an unnatural situation, and under contrary influences, it would not be thus tossed and disquieted. For what reason doth he contrive for himself such a chain and succession of entertainments ; and take care to be delivered over from one folly, one diversion, to another, without intermission ? Why, but because he dreads to leave any void spaces of life unfilled, lest conscience should find work for his mind at those intervals ? He hath no way to fence against guilty reflections, but by stopping up all the avenues at which they might enter. Hence, his strong addiction to company, his aversion to darkness and solitude ; which recollect the thoughts, and turn the mind inward upon itself, by shutting out external objects and impressions. It is not, because the pleasures of society are always new and grateful to him, that he pursues them thus keenly ; for they soon lose their relish, and grow flat and insipid, by repetition. They are not his choice, but his refuge ; for the truth is, he dare not long converse with himself, and with his own thoughts ; and the worst company in the world is better to

him, than that of a reproving conscience.

Believe it, the tales of ghosts and spectres were not, as is commonly said, the mere inventions of designing men to keep weak minds in awe; nor the products only of a religious fear, degenerated into melancholy and superstition; but wicked men, haunted with a sense of their own guilt (as the cruel Tetrarch here in the text, with the Baptist's murder) were used to affright themselves with such phantoms as these, and often mistook strong and terrible imaginations for real apparitions.

I know it will be said, that though this be often, yet it is not always the case; since we have now and then instances of men, who lead very flagitious lives, and yet feel not any of these qualms or pangs of conscience; but do, in all appearance, live easily, and sometimes even die calmly. Which could not be, say the objectors, if the principle of conscience, and the condemning power of it, were natural to man; for it would then act like other natural principles, universally, and without exception. Having hitherto therefore illustrated the truth by observations drawn
from

from scripture, reason, and experience ; I shall now attempt to explain this difficulty.

In order to this I observe, that we are deceived often in the judgment we pass on such occasions. In our common intercourse with the world, we see only the outside and surface, as it were, of men's actions, but cannot tell how it is with them inwardly, and at the bottom. We frame our opinions of them from what passes in conversation and public places, where they may be upon their guard, acting a part, and studying appearances. The hypocrite in perfection will put on the mask so artificially, that it shall seem to be real and natural. Decency, and a desire of esteem, shall enable men to cover great passions and frailties, which nevertheless sit very closely to them, and, as soon as those restraints are taken off, break out with freedom. We have read of those, who have been endued with such a constancy and firmness of temper, as even to endure the rack, and to appear composed under the pains of it, without owning their crime, or declaring their accomplices. And in like manner, the torments of a guilty conscience may some-

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times

times be borne and dissembled. I observe farther,

That the disorders and reprehensions of conscience are not a continued, but an intermitting disease ; returning upon the mind by fits, and at particular seasons only ; in the intervals of which the patient shall have seeming health, and real ease. The eruptions of burning mountains are not perpetual, nor doth even the smoak itself ascend always from the tops of them : but though the seeds of fire lodged in their caverns may be stifled and suppressed for a time, yet anon they gather strength, and break out again, with a rage great in proportion to its discontinuance. It is by accidents and occasions chiefly that the power of this principle is called forth into act ; by a sudden ill turn of fortune, or a fit of sickness, or the observation of some remarkable instance of divine vengeance, which hath overtaken other men in like cases. Even Herod was not always under the paroxysm described in the text, but surprised into it unawares, by his hearing of the fame of Jesus ; and then his heart smote him at the remembrance of the inhuman treatment he had given

to such another just and good person, and filled his mind anew with forgotten horrors. We cannot therefore, from a present calm of thought, know, either how it hath been with a man heretofore, or how it shall be with him hereafter; but may easily in such cases, and do often judge wrong judgment; saying, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace," but a truce only; and where it will appear, that there was none, whenever affliction ruffles a man's soul, or a death-bed rouses him: then, and sometimes not till then, all masks and disguises are thrown off, and the mind appears naked and unguarded to itself and others.

On the whole, since the wise Author of our natures hath so contrived them, that guilt is naturally, and almost necessarily attended with trouble and uneasiness, let us from hence be persuaded to preserve the purity, that we may preserve the peace and tranquillity of our minds. For pleasure's sake, let us abstain from all criminal pleasures and pollutions; because the racking pains of guilt, duly awakened, are really an overbalance to the greatest sensual gratifications. The charms of vice, how tempting
soever

soever they may seem to be, are by no means equivalent to the inward remorse and trouble, and the tormenting reflections which attend it; which always keep pace with our guilt, and are proportioned to the greatness and daringness of our crimes: for “mighty sinners, here as well as hereafter, shall be mightily tormented.” Sins of omission, infirmity, and surprise there will be; even the just man falls seven times a day by them, and rises again from them with strength and cheerfulness to his duty; but let us be sure carefully to guard against all such flagrant enormities, as do violence to the first and plainest dictates of our reason, and overbear the strongest impulses of our conscience; for these will certainly leave a wound behind them, which we shall find it hard to bear, and harder, much harder to cure. Let no temptation, no interest, no influence whatsoever, sway us to do any thing contrary to the suggestions of conscience in plain cases, and points of moment; let us no more dare to do in private what that tells us ought not to be done, than if we were upon an open theatre, and the eyes of the whole creation were upon us. What signifies

signifies it that we escape the view and observation of men, when the watchful witness within sees and records all our faults, and will certainly one day reprove us, and set our misdeeds in order before us.

It hath been reckoned a good rule for the happy conduct of life, to be sure of keeping our domestic concerns right, and of being easy under our own roof, where we may find an agreeable retreat and shelter from any disappointments we meet with in the great scene of vexation, the world. And the same rule will, with greater reason, hold, in relation to the peace of our consciences. Let our first care be to keep all quiet and serene there: when this point is once gained at home, external accidents will not be able deeply to affect us; and unless it be gained, all the pleasures, the abundance, and pomp of life will be insipid and tasteless to us.

Wherefore let us resolve to adhere steadily to that principle, which will keep us easy when we are alone, and will remain with us in an hour when all outward comforts will fail us. Let us "keep innocence,
" and

“and do the thing which is right;” for whatever other expedients towards happiness men may take up with, “that,” and that only, “will bring a man peace at the last.”

S E R M O N III.

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN WORSHIP EX-
PLAINED AND RECOMMENDED.

JOHN iv. 23, 24.

The hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth. God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.

PURE religion and undefiled is founded in the nature and truth of things, and when exhibited to the world in this light, is an amiable and venerable thing; as far superior to what is commonly

monly professed, as the original paintings of some of the greatest artists, to the vulgar pieces of low performers. In the former, you see simplicity, proportion and truth; every thing calculated to instruct and please: in the other, so many unmeaning strokes, and unnatural attitudes, and such whimsical and ill-judged drapery, as unavoidably occasion disgust or ridicule.

To know what true religion is, we must consult, and in order to draw a fair and just picture of it, we must keep to nature. Every departure from it discovers a false taste, and tends to the propagation of it; and when once such a taste becomes general, it makes way for endless corruptions, and even for the establishment of them.

Our Saviour came into the world to settle religion upon its primitive foundations, and to give mankind a representation or draught of it, agreeable to eternal and immutable truth. For this end he was born, and for this cause came he into the world, that he might bear witness to the truth. He began his work, as one may say, with a free criticism upon the false draughts which others had
given

given of it. He pointed out their errors and blemishes, their defects and superfluities, and reducing it to the simplicity of nature, cleared it of all the unskilful colourings, by which ignorant or designing men had debased and misrepresented it. His excellent sermon upon the mount is one instance of this among many: and his discourse with the Samaritan woman is another: of which, in order to clear up the doctrine of the text, it may not be amiss to take a little notice.

There had been of a long standing a schism between the Samaritans and the Jews, and their mutual antipathy ran so high, that they had little or no correspondence the one with the other. This was the reason why the Samaritan woman, upon our Saviour's asking her a little water to drink, wondered that he, who appeared in the garb of a Jew, should ask a favour of her, who was a Samaritan; for the Jews, says the Evangelist, have no dealings with the Samaritans. They looked upon them as an execrable people, and had wrought themselves up to such a high pitch of rancour and hatred, as to declare it unlawful for any
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of their nation to shew them even common civilities.

By the tradition of the Pharisees, they were permitted, in cases of necessity, to buy of them such things as they had immediate occasion for, as we find the disciples in the context doing; but otherwise, they were to have no intercourse with them, no, not in the lowest offices of kindness and humanity. A lively example this of the cruel and outrageous effects of religious disputes. Deplorable case! when religion, the only cure, becomes itself the cause of contention. When that which should sweeten men's tempers, fours them: when that which should cool and moderate their resentments, inflames and heightens them; and by a strange kind of inversion, becomes the unhappy occasion of those disgusts and enmities, those intemperate altercations and bickerings, which it was intended to prevent, or cure. But worst of all, when it almost makes men forget that they are men, and in the room of improving their natures, goes far to divest them of their humanity; prompting them, under the cloak of zeal for the dogmas of a party, to stifle and counter-act

act some of the loveliest and most useful principles of their natures.

But whence this unhappy quarrel? What was the ground and cause of this strange bitterness and mutual dislike? Was it, because the one professed a false, the other a true religion? Was it, because they differed about the object to be worshipped, or the particular manner in which worship was to be paid? Nothing of this seems to have been the case. They both professed to worship the God of the patriarchs, and they both professed to worship him according to the institution of Moses, or in the use of such rites and forms as he had ordained.

About what then did they disagree? About the place of worship, about the particular spot of ground upon which the temple of God ought to have been erected. The one had set up theirs upon mount Gerizim, the other theirs upon mount Moriah. The one alledged this, the other that, to be the true place of worship; and to support their respective pleas, the Samaritan urged antiquity and the practice of the venerable men of old, who had often paid their homage upon the mount where the temple stood. The Jew,

Jew, on the other hand, urged divine appointment and the authority of their common lawgiver, Moses. Thus the controversy stood, at the time our Saviour had this discourse with the Samaritan woman. And from hence he takes occasion to declare (being first asked his judgment upon the case) that though the Jews had the better plea, yet at that time neither the controversy nor the decision of it was of any consequence; and that therefore their feuds and animosities that had hitherto been raised and fomented by it, ought immediately to subside, and for ever to cease. For what signified their contending about a particular place of worship, when the worship itself was about to be abolished, and a more sublime and spiritual one set up in its room? "Woman, believe me," says he "the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem shall ye worship the father. The hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the father in spirit and in truth." This is the worship which God is even now seeking to establish in the world; and they who offer it (be they of what distinction or party they will) are the men that
render

render him the greatest honour, and whom he will accordingly accept as paying him the most agreeable homage.

God is spirit ; a pure, simple mind or intelligence : and nothing but what proceeds from mind or spirit ; no worship but what is intelligent and rational, spiritual or moral, can be acceptable or pleasing to him.

He must be worshipped (if worshipped acceptably) not by mere outward things, nor by the oblation of a beast, the dedication of a temple, or the mere actions and postures of the body ; but by something that is the result and genuine offspring of reason and intellect ; by such acts and sentiments of the mind, such dispositions and affections of the heart, as kindle and gather strength, and grow habitual, by frequent contemplations of him, by an improving sense of relation to him, and a familiar and well cultivated acquaintance with him. This is worshipping God in spirit, or in the way that creatures endued with intellectual and spiritual powers, should worship the one uncreated and omnipresent spirit of the universe : and it is also worshipping him in truth, or in conformity to the reality
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and exact truth of his immutable and all perfect nature.

More particularly, The text instructs us, in the first place, that worship and homage are due to Almighty God.

By worship I mean some method of acknowledging and keeping up the remembrance of a deity and a providence in the world, of confessing his greatness and our weakness, his goodness and our dependence. This is a sentiment which nature itself dictates, a principle which all the nations of the world have adopted and uniformly professed.

There has indeed been no uniformity in the ways and methods by which men have chosen to testify and express their regards to the deity, or such invisible powers as they imagined to preside in the world: different nations have had their different rites and modes and forms of worship; and some of them, it must be allowed, as absurd, ridiculous, and dishonourable to God, as could well have been devised. But still, as in all ages and in all parts of the world something like the face of religion has been kept up, and some traces and monuments of piety have been met with, this shews what the general
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and uniform opinion of mankind is, and always has been. These very rites and forms, how absurd soever in themselves, are not more certain proofs and instances of the great corruption of human nature, than they are of the original and almost universal sense of mankind, as to the article of worship.

In order to convince mankind universally of the obligation and fitness of this important duty, is any thing farther necessary than to fix their reflections for a moment upon the essential and immutable perfections and relations of God; to consider him as their maker, friend and sovereign, as possessed of infinite greatness, unbounded goodness, and universal dominion? Is it possible, under these views of him, to be insensible of the propriety, reasonableness and necessary obligation of such acts, both inward and outward, as worship and religion means?

Can I, for instance, believe, I had my being from him, and yet not revere the hand from which I had it? Can I believe that I am still dependant on him, and yet never acknowledge that dependance? That he preserves my life, supports my frame, supplies my wants, over-rules and guides my motions, and kindly interests

himself in all my affairs ; and yet imagine I have no connection with him, nor owe him any returns ? Can I think that he sees me in all situations, that he is acquainted with all my fears, with all my weaknesses, distresses, and designs ; and, as he is Lord over all, can minister suitably and abundantly to my particular case, and yet be a stranger to all address and application to him ?

I cannot do any of these things, without plainly contradicting the professions of my mouth, and stifling the very dictates and feelings of my own heart ; I cannot do them, without in effect denying God to be what he is in himself, and what I am supposed to believe he is to me, my creator, benefactor and sovereign, the source and sole support of my being and felicity. For never to acknowledge the favours we receive and hold of him, and not to apply to him for what we want, is in effect either to deny that we have any wants, or his power and willingness to relieve us under them, and consequently is a denial of God's essential perfections, and of all the relations he stands in to us. So that it is not more certain that God is, and that we are his
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creatures, dependants and servants, than it is that we owe him homage, and should render it to him. The refusal or neglect of it, is a manifest departure from eternal truth, and a virtual denial of his natural excellencies and relative character. This then is the first thing implied in the text, that worship in general is God's right; and indeed it is rather implied, than directly taught or urged; nor was there much occasion to do this, because it was a universally received truth.

The next thing here intended to be taught, relates to the manner of worship: this our Saviour intimates must be adjusted and regulated by the true nature of God; from whence we may deduce a second observation,

That right notions of God are essential to right worship. Without these we shall worship we know not what, a mere creature of fancy, an image or fiction of our own, and not the true God.

Adequate ideas of God we neither have nor can have. Finite can never comprehend infinite. But honourable and worthy notions we may and ought to have: and without such our worship of him will be as absurd and unsuitable, as

our imaginations are vain and false; nor shall we have any thing to guard us from falling in with the most detestable superstitions and inventions of men. He that thinks God is like himself, will naturally honour him in a way that he apprehends would be pleasing to himself. Whatever he falsely apprehends his prevailing character to be, he will be sure to suit his worship accordingly; and to bring into it all the rites and forms that he imagines are agreeable to a being of that complexion. If he thinks him haughty and proud, he will honour him with such adulations and flatteries as are grateful to pride. If he imagines that he delights in pomp and magnificence, he will honour him with such costly oblations and superb structures, and other instances of a ceremonious worship, as he presumes will be pleasing to a being of that turn of mind. If he conceive of him as an angry, fierce and arbitrary being, he will approach him with dread, and study to appease him with bodily austerities and other unnatural methods of a rigorous and cruel service. Or lastly, if he apprehends him to be of a soft and tender nature, apt to be moved and influenced by weak
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and effeminate pity, he will then endeavour to work upon him by all the forms and ingredients of a distressed and melancholy devotion. In short, false and unbecoming notions of the Deity have always been attended with false and unbecoming ways of worshipping him. These have been the source of endless impertinencies in the religion both of the Pagan, Jewish, and Christian world. And the only way to make men sensible of them, and to abate their fondness for them, is to lead them into juster notions of the nature and attributes of God; particularly, of his unity, spirituality, self-sufficiency, omnipresence, and absolute supremacy; and above all, his perfectly good and most adorable moral character.

With these sublime and worthy sentiments of the Deity, what can we want, that is necessary, either to awaken our piety, or to regulate the forms of it? Either to preserve us from the extremes of atheism and irreligion on the one hand, or from every species of idolatry, superstition, and false or mock-devotion, on the other? These will be a constant spring of good affections towards him, and a strong in-

centive to exercise them in the most proper and suitable manner. Under the immediate influence of these, our worship will not only be habitual and stated, but always rational and manly, elevated, sincere, and undivided.

He that believes that God is one, and but one, can never divide his worship amongst many. He that believes he is superior to all, will certainly honour him above all. He that thinks he is equally present every where, will naturally conclude he may pour out his heart before him any where: and if he conceives of him as an immense and pure spirit, possessing all the excellencies of moral character in the highest degree, he must be led to honour him with a pure heart, and a holy life, and in the exercise of such good dispositions as correspond to, and are transcribed from the nature of that great and all-perfect original, which he makes the object of his worship. And this leads me to take notice of another great truth intended to be here taught, and that is,

That the worship of the heart is by far the noblest and most excellent kind of worship, and what God chiefly respects. All without it is nothing
but

but impertinence, the semblance without the reality, the dead, unbreathing carcase without the active and enlivening spirit of piety. This our Saviour esteems the most valuable and important part of worship; that without which the most pompous outward solemnities are altogether void of dignity, and no more to be accounted of than empty show and vain amusement. It comprehends, in it such things as these:—the actual engagement of the mind in the time of worship; without which, whatever there may be devotional in a man's mien and posture, he is no better in the eyes of God than a praying statue:—sincerity and right intentions, without which he is worse than a statue, even an impostor and a hypocrite; a character which God abhors:—and in fine, the lively exercise of all those good affections which have their seat in the heart, which flow from a prevailing sense of God, and fitly answer to the various parts of worship in which we are engaged.

Lastly, As the worship of the heart is incomparably the most important and necessary part of worship, so the acceptableness of this depends upon nothing

external; upon no distinction of places, upon no particular times, modes or usages, but entirely upon its own intrinsic worth, its own natural and eternal fitness. It neither gains nor loses by the magnificence or the meanness, by the antiquity or the novelty, by the imaginary sacredness or commonness of the place where it is offered. It subsisted before there were either temples or altars, any fixed hours, forms or gestures of devotion, and might and may subsist without them still. The inward movements of the heart, the noble tempers of esteem and reverence, confidence and gratitude, in which alone consists all true devotion, are of a consideration quite distinct from all externals whatsoever, and altogether independent of them. These the great discerners and judges of hearts is a constant witness to; these he always beholds with a full complacency; nor is there any thing in modes and circumstances, in times, places, or postures, that can make them either more or less acceptable to him.

This is the great lesson our Saviour here designed to teach; the useful and important sentiment he inculcated for the
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cure of a general and reigning superstition. He would have men believe, that the father of the universe is neither a corporeal, a topical, or a capricious being, but a perfectly good spirit, that is every where present, and regards nothing so much as truth in the inward parts. He would have them believe, contrary to the notions that had hitherto obtained, that it is not the grandeur of an edifice, nor the fancied holiness of its materials and utensils, nor all the rich and showy ornaments which art and fancy may contrive, or opulence procure, that determines his residence to any place. He would have them believe, that he who made the heavens and the earth, and whom even the heaven of heavens cannot contain, is not confined to temples made with hands, neither served therewith as though he needed any thing, "seeing he giveth to
"all life and breath and all things:" that he delights not in a multitude of sacrifices, in the blood of rams and goats, in the perfumes of incense, or the steams of victims, in thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil. On the contrary, to obey, in his estimation is, and always was, better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

The perfumes of the most fragrant incense are not so pleasing to him as the breathings of an honest heart; and who-so offereth him the praises of a grateful mind, and a well-conducted life, glorifies him more, than if he brought before him all the fowls of heaven, or slaughtered at his altars the cattle on a thousand hills.

“God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit
“and in truth.”

S E R M O N IV.

VINDICATION OF HUMAN NATURE.

ROMANS viv. 7.

Herne

For none of us liveth to himself.

THERE is not a sentence in scripture which strikes a narrow soul with greater astonishment; and one might as easily engage to clear up the darkeſt problem in geometry to an ignorant mind, as make a ſordid one comprehend the truth and reaſonableneſs of

this plain proposition. No man liveth to himself! Why! does any man live to any thing else? In the whole compass of human life, can a prudent man steer to a safer point? Not live to himself! To whom then? Can any interests or concerns, which are foreign to a man's self, have such a claim over him, that he must serve under them, suspend his own pursuits, step out of his right course, till others have passed by him, and attained the several ends and purposes of living before him?

If, with a selfish heart, such an enquirer should happen to have a speculating head too, he will proceed, and ask you whether this same principle, which the Apostle here throws out of the life of man, is not, in fact, the grand bias of his nature? That, however we may flatter ourselves with fine-spun notions of disinterestedness and heroism in what we do; were the most popular of our actions stripped naked, and the true motives and intentions of them searched to the bottom; we should find little reason for triumph upon that score.

In a word, he will say, that a man is altogether a bubble to himself in this matter,

matter, and that after all that can be said in his behalf, the truest definition that can be given of him is this, that he is a selfish animal; and that all his actions have so strong a tincture of that character, as to shew, to whomsoever else he was intended to live, that in fact he lives only to himself.

Before I reply directly to this accusation, I cannot help observing by the way, that there is scarcely any thing which has done more disservice to social virtue, than the frequent representations of human nature, under this hideous picture of deformity, which, by leaving out all that is generous and friendly in the heart of man, has sunk him below the level of a brute, as if he was a composition of all that was mean-spirited and selfish. Surely, it is one step towards acting well, to think worthily of our nature; and, as in common life, the way to make a man honest, is, to suppose him so, and treat him as such; so here, to set some value upon ourselves, enables us to support the character, and even inspires and adds sentiments of generosity and virtue to those which we have already preconceived. The scripture tells us, that God
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made man in his own image; not surely in the sensitive and corporeal part of him, that could bear no resemblance to a pure and infinite spirit; but what resemblance he bore, was undoubtedly in the moral rectitude, and the kind and benevolent affections of his nature. And though the brightness of this image has been sullied, and the characters of it rendered less legible, by the prevalence of depraved affections and vicious manners in all ages of the world, yet it is a laudable pride, and a true greatness of mind, to cherish a belief, that there is so much of that glorious image still left upon it, as shall restrain him from base and disgraceful actions: to answer which end, what thought can be more conducive than that, of our being made in the likeness of the greatest and the best of beings? This is a plain consequence. And the consideration of it should have, in some measure, been a protection to human nature, from the rough usage she has met with from the satirical pens of so many writers, who, with more wit than well-meaning, have desperately fallen
foul

foul upon the whole species, as a set of creatures incapable either of private friendship or public spirit, but just as the case suited their own interest and advantage.

That there is selfishness, and meanness enough in the souls of one part of the world, to hurt the credit of the other part of it, is what I shall not dispute against; but to judge of the whole, from this bad sample, and because one man is plotting and artful in his nature; or, a second openly makes his pleasure or his profit the sole centre of all his designs; or, because a third strait-hearted wretch sits confined within himself, feels no misfortunes but those which touch himself; to involve the whole race without mercy under such detested characters, is a conclusion as false as it is pernicious; and was it in general to gain credit, could serve no end, but the rooting out of our nature all that is generous, and planting in the stead of it such an aversion to each other, as must untie the bands of society, and rob us of one of the greatest pleasures of it, the mutual communication of kind offices; and by poisoning the fountain, render every thing suspected that flows through it. To

To the honour of human nature, the scripture teaches us, that God made man upright, and though he has since found out many inventions, which have much dishonoured this noble structure, yet the foundation of it stands as it was: the whole frame and design is carried on upon social virtue and public spirit, and every member is so evidently supported by this strong cement, that we may say with the Apostle, "that no man liveth to himself." In whatsoever light we view him, we shall see evidently, that there is no station or condition of his life, no office, or relation, or circumstance, but there arises from it so many ties, so many indispensable claims upon him, as must perpetually carry him beyond any selfish consideration, and shew plainly, that was a man foolishly wicked enough to design to live to himself alone, he would either find it impracticable, or he would lose, at least, the very thing which made life itself desirable. We know that our Creator, like an all-wise contriver in this, as in all other of his works, has implanted in mankind such appetites and inclinations as were suitable for their state; that is, such as would naturally

turally lead him to the love of society and friendship, without which he would have been found in a worse condition than the very beasts of the field. No one, therefore, who lives in society, can be said to live to himself. He lives to his God, to his king, and to his country; he lives to his family, to his friends, to all under his trust; and, in a word, he lives to the whole race of mankind: whatsoever has the character of man, and wears the same image of God that he does, is truly his brother, and has a just claim to his kindness. That this is the case in fact, as well as in theory, may be made plain to any one, who has made any observations upon human life. When we have traced it through all its connections, viewed it under the several obligations which succeed each other in a perpetual rotation through the different stages of a hasty pilgrimage, we shall find that these do operate so strongly upon it, and lay us justly under so many restraints, that we are every hour sacrificing something to society, in return for the benefits we receive from it.

To illustrate this, let us take a short survey of the life of any one man (not liable

able to great exceptions, but such a life as is common to most); let us examine it merely with reference to this point, and try how far it will answer such a representation.

If we begin with him in that early age, wherein the strongest marks of undisguised tenderness and disinterested compassion shew themselves. I might previously observe, with what impressions he is come out of the hand of God, with the very bias upon his nature which prepares him for the character which he was designed to fulfil. But let us pass by the years which denote childhood, as no lawful evidence, you'll say, in this dispute: let us follow him to the period when he is just got loose from tutors and governors, when his actions may be argued upon with less exception. If you observe you will find, that one of the first and leading propensities of his nature, is that which discovers itself in the desire of society, and the spontaneous love towards those of his kind. And though the natural wants and exigencies of his condition are, no doubt, one reason of this amiable impulse; God having founded that in him, as a provisional security to make him social; yet though it is a reason
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son in nature, it is a reason, to him yet undiscovered.

Youth is not apt to philosophize so deeply, but follows, as it feels itself prompted by the inward workings of benevolence, without view to itself, or previous calculation either of the loss or profit which may accrue. Agreeably to this, observe how warmly, how heartily he enters into friendships! how disinterested, and unsuspicious in the choice of them! how generous and open in his professions! how sincere and honest in making them good! When his friend is in distress, what lengths will he go, what hazards will he bring upon himself, what embarrassment upon his affairs, to extricate and serve him! If man is altogether a selfish creature, as those moralizers would make him, it is certain he does not arrive at the full maturity of it, in this time of his life. No. If he deserves any accusation, it is in the other extreme, "That in his youth he is generally more fool than knave," and so far from being suspected of living to himself, that he lives rather to every body else; the unconscionableness of art and design in his own intentions, rendering him so utterly void
of

of a suspicion of it in others, as to leave him too often a bubble to every one who will take the advantage ; but you will say, he soon abates of these transports of disinterested love ; and as he grows older, grows wiser, and learns to live more to himself.

Let us examine.

That a longer knowledge of the world, and some experience of insincerity, will teach him a lesson of more caution in the choice of friendships, and less forwardness in the undistinguished offers of his services, is what I grant. But if he cools of these, does he not grow warmer still in connections of a different kind ? Follow him, I pray you, into the next stage of life, where he has entered into engagements, and appears as the father of a family, and you will see the passion still remains ; the stream somewhat more confined, but runs the stronger for it ; the same benevolence of heart, altered only in its course, and the difference of objects towards which it tends. Take a short view of him in this light, as acting under the many tender claims which that relation lays upon him ; spending many weary days, and sleepless nights, utterly forget-

forgetful of himself, intent only upon his family, and with an anxious heart contriving and labouring to keep it from distress, against that hour when he shall be taken from its protection. Does such a one live to himself? He who rises early, late takes rest, and eats the bread of carefulness, to save others the sorrow of doing so after him; does such a one live only to himself? Ye, who are parents, answer this question for him. How oft have ye sacrificed your health, your ease, your pleasures, nay, the very comforts of your lives, for the sake of your children! how many indulgencies have you given up! what self-denials and difficulties have ye cheerfully undergone for them! In their sickness, or reports of their misconduct, how have ye "gone on your way sorrowing!" What alarms within you, when fancy has foreboded but imaginary misfortunes hanging over them! but when real ones have overtaken them, "and mischief befallen them in the way in which they have gone," how sharper than a sword have ye felt the workings of parental kindness! In whatever period of human life we look for proofs of selfishness, let us not seek them

them in this relation of a parent, whose whole life, when truly known, is often little else but a succession of cares, heart-aches, and disquieting apprehensions, enough to shew, that he is but an instrument in the hand of God, to provide for the well-being of others, to serve their interest as well as his own.

If you try the truth of this reasoning upon every other part or situation of the same life, you will find it holds good in one degree or other. Take a view of it out of these closer connections both of a friend and parent. Consider him for a moment under that natural alliance, in which even a heathen poet has placed him; namely, that of a man: and as such, to his honour, as one incapable of standing unconcerned in whatever concerns his fellow-creatures. Compassion has so great a share in our nature, and the miseries of this world are so constant an exercise of it, as to leave it in no one's power, who deserves the name of man, in this respect, "to live to himself."

He cannot stop his ears against the cries of the unfortunate. The sad story of the fatherless, and him that has no helper, must be heard. "The sorrow-
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“ful sighing of the prisoners will come
“before him ;” and a thousand other untold cases of distress, to which the life of man is subject, find a way to his heart, let interest guard the passage as it will :
“if he has this world’s goods, and seeth
“his brother have need, he will not be
“able to shut up his bowels of compassion from him.”

Let any man of common humanity look back upon his own life, as subjected to these strong claims, and recollect the influence they have had upon him : how often the mere impulses of generosity and compassion have led him out of his way : in how many acts of charity and kindness, his fellow-feeling for others has made him forget himself : in neighbourly offices, how often he has acted against all considerations of profit, convenience, nay, sometimes even of justice itself. Let him add to this account, how much, in the progress of his life, has been given up even to the lesser obligations of civility and good manners ; what restraints they have laid him under ; how large a portion of time, how much of his inclination and the plan of life he should most have wished, has from time to time been
made

made a sacrifice to his good nature and disinclination to give pain or disgust to others.

Whoever takes a view of the life of man, in this glass wherein I have shewn it, will find it so beset and hemmed in with obligations of one kind or other, as to leave little room to suspect, that "man can live to himself." And so closely has our Creator linked us together, as well as all other parts of his works, for the preservation of that harmony in the frame and system of things which his wisdom has at first established, that we find this bond of mutual dependence, however relaxed, is too strong to be broke; and I believe, that the most selfish men find it is so, and that they cannot, in fact, live so much to themselves, as the narrowness of their own hearts incline them. If these reflections are just, upon the moral relations in which we stand to each other, let us close the examination with a short reflection upon the great relation in which we stand to God.

The first and most natural thought on this subject, which at one time or other will thrust itself upon every man's mind, is this, That there is a God who made me,

me, to whose gift I owe all the powers and faculties of my soul, to whose providence I owe all the blessings of my life, and by whose permission it is that I exercise and enjoy them; that I am placed in this world as a creature but of a day, hastening to the place from whence I shall not return: that I am accountable for my conduct and behaviour to this greatest and wisest of Beings, before whose judgment seat I must finally appear, and receive the things done in my body, whether they are good, or whether they are bad.

Can any one doubt but the most inconsiderate of men sometimes sit down coolly, and make some such plain reflections as these upon their state and condition? or that, after they have made them, can one imagine they lose all effect? As little appearance as there is of religion in the world, there is a great deal of its influence felt in its affairs; nor can one so root out the principles of it, but, like nature, they will return again, and give checks and interruptions to guilty pursuits. There are seasons, when the thoughts of a just God overlooking, and the terror of an after-reckoning, have

made the most determined tremble, and stop short in the execution of a wicked purpose. And if we conceive that the worst of men lay some restraints upon themselves from the weight of this principle, what shall we think of the good and virtuous part of the world, who live under the perpetual influence of it; who sacrifice their appetites and passions from a conscience of their duty to God, and consider him as the object to whom they have dedicated their service, and make that the first principle and ultimate end of all their actions? How many real and unaffected instances there are in this world, of men thus governed, will not so much concern us to enquire, as to take care that we are of the number: which may God grant through Jesus Christ. Amen.

S E R M O N V.

THE PECULIAR GUILT AND INFAMY OF
PREVAILING WICKEDNESS IN AN
ENLIGHTENED AGE.

JOHN IX. 41.

*Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye
should have no sin; but now ye say,
we see, therefore your sin remaineth.*

IT is scarcely possible for the most inat-
tentive reader not to observe, that the
latter part of these words of our blessed
Saviour are as strictly applicable to the
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present age, as if they had been intended for a prophetic description of it : of which it is represented to be the just, and in many respects the discriminating character, that it is an age of light and liberty. Upon this we are apt to triumph, and even to proceed so far, as to insult the unfortunate ignorance and superstition of our forefathers ; congratulating ourselves, that we were born in happier times, when those thick mists of error, which formerly overspread our native land, are in a great measure dispelled. And notwithstanding the danger that there is, in all cases of this kind, of our running to an excess, and claiming undue honours through pride and self-flattery, it must, I think, be admitted as a certain and obvious fact, that we really enjoy eminent advantages for understanding the true nature and design of religion, and the obligations and extent of moral goodness. For we have the unrestrained use of a divine revelation to direct us : we are delivered from most of the grosser and more dangerous mistakes and innovations of popery, repugnant to the plainest dictates of reason, and some of them subversive of all the principles of
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of virtue, by the glorious reformation: and by free and publick disquisitions and searches after truth, hardly tolerated in any other nation, nor known till of late, in the same degree, in our own, the authority of religion has been clearly stated, unanswerably defended, and settled on its just foundation. These are our privileges. And what now ought to be our conduct? to say we see, and yet to act as if we were blind? to make an empty and insolent ostentation of our light, while we walk in darkness? is this rational? is it ingenuous? is it renconcilable with a single spark of discretion, or modesty? with the least notion of refinement and elegance of manners, or of the rules of right behaviour? The common sense of mankind universally declares the contrary; it immediately condemns the practice as absurd and infamous: and whenever it is consulted, it must speak to all such perverse and bold offenders in a language like that of the text, "if ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say, WE SEE, therefore your sin remaineth."

That sins committed against knowledge are most highly aggravated; is

a truth to which the universal reason of mankind in every age has agreed ; nay, the reason even of the vicious part of mankind ; who have always endeavoured to shelter themselves under the covert of ignorance, and thought that the best defence which they could make for their immoralities. And it is no wonder, that none have ever been hardy enough to attempt a direct vindication of the crimes which we are now speaking of, since they appear at first sight to be of so heinous and black a nature, as to excite strong resentment, aversion, and surprise ; the passions usually moved, when any thing unnatural and monstrous presents itself. Offences of this kind are deliberate and presumptuous, and a wilful violence offered to the noblest powers of human nature ; they argue a rooted contempt of God, of reason, religion, conscience, (the most sacred ties that bind mankind) and of all notions of order and regularity : upon which accounts they admit of no softenings, of no favourable circumstances ; nor is it possible to invent any plausible colours, to cover and disguise their malignity.

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Most other offenders may give their vices a specious turn, and find out some plea at least to mitigate their guilt ; which, though it be really lame and defective, may give them a better opinion of themselves than they could otherwise entertain, and moderate the censure of their fellow-creatures, either that they were ignorant of their duty through a defect of understanding, and for want of necessary instruction ; that, together with this, their education was loose and vicious ; that instead of having early sentiments of religion and virtue instilled into their minds, they were corrupted from their infancy by bad principles ; and that a constant course of ill examples, and continual provocations and encouragements to licentiousness, prevented reflection, and suppressed the dictates of natural conscience : or else, that they had at most but faint convictions, and an indistinct and confused sense of what was right ; which were therefore the more easily over-ruled by the powerful influence of irregular desires. By such excuses as these, however, upon the whole, feigned and unavailing, may some of the guilty part of mankind hope in a great

measure to palliate their evil practices, and escape the rigours of divine justice.

But let that man, who, with a full persuasion of the truth and certainty of the fundamental principles of religion, and exact notions of virtue and morality, leads an atheistical, lewd, dissolute life; let, I say, such a cool and determined offender retire inward to recollect his thoughts a little, and then try what defence he can possibly make, with all his skill and subtilty. Let him try by what stretch of fancy, what artful evasions, and false glosses, he shall be able to vindicate himself to his own reason, which strongly points out to him a different method of conduct; or to the impartial judgment of all other rational creatures; or, which is of infinitely higher moment, to that supreme Being who made and governs the universe, and will, for all his disorders, bring him into judgment. Certain it is, that there is but one course left for him to take, besides exhibiting no plea at all, and that is, frankly to acknowledge, that he has followed licentious courses, and the bent of unruly appetites, in a direct and resolute opposition to the authority of his maker, and to all the

the rules of virtue and decency. But such a confession as this cannot, one would think, be made, by the most abandoned sinner, without some kind of confusion and remorse; since it discovers an incorrigible depravity of inward temper: which must, in the nature of things, and upon all principles of wisdom and equity, expose to a very severe punishment.

Thus it undeniably appears, that sins committed against knowledge, and juster apprehensions of things, are of a peculiar and most complicated guilt. I shall now consider the subject in a somewhat different light, and endeavour to shew, that they form such a notorious absurdity and inconsistency of character, as is, in an eminent degree, disgraceful. Vice is, in itself, the foulest stain and blemish to a rational nature, debasing and enslaving all its faculties: but when a corruption of morals prevails in times that are more refined and enlightened, when the principles of virtue are justly explained, and proved to be of unquestionable weight and authority, then it is that it rises to the utmost point of infamy. Suffer me to illustrate this truth by a few pertinent and strong examples, as being the most

effectual method, that can be taken, to impress a deep and lively sense of it.

Let us suppose it then to be a true description of the present age, That it has got clear of several superstitious prejudices, by which preceding ages were held, as it were, in fetters, and by a more impartial study of the doctrines of revelation, by exercises of reason, and free inquiry, has attained to more worthy conceptions of the deity; that it has discovered more of his wisdom and goodness in the constitution of nature, and can account for many difficult appearances, which have been thought a diminution and reproach to his moral excellencies; and that, instead of entertaining gloomy and hideous notions of him, as an arbitrary, stern, inexorable being, or having but a partial view of his attributes, it considers them in their natural and beautiful harmony, and has acquired sublime and amiable apprehensions of his perfections, and of the scheme and operations of his providence; if this, I say, be the real character of the men of the present age, or if it be a character which they lay claim to, one would naturally expect

expect from hence, to find every possible token of esteem and honour paid to the infinite creator and judge of all, and the utmost reverence and exactness in the offices of piety and devotion. And it must be indecent to the last degree, it must appear shocking to our first reflections, if instead of mentioning the name of this eternal and most excellent Being, who supports the fabrick of the universe, and is the only origin of good, with veneration and respect; they make it a bye-word, introducing it, on the most impertinent occasions, to give a pretended force and energy to their discourse, and fill up the blank spaces of it; nay, use it to heighten an idle jest, and mix it with the very follies and vices of their conversation: and if they treat his laws, his providence, and the solemnities of his worship, with indignity and contempt.

Again, If we allow the age, in which we live, to understand thoroughly the rules and measures of justice, and to be much improved in the speculative science of the principles of generosity and benevolence; and especially, if it
“lays such an undue stress on exercises

of humanity and the social virtues, as to make them include the whole substance both of religion and morality: It will of necessity render itself so much the more infamous, if it practises undermining and treachery, and the mean artifices of fraud and deceit, and indulges a spirit of selfishness and cruelty; or if it represents pride and revenge as heroick accomplishments; determines inconsiderable, imaginary, and perhaps deserved affronts to be capital crimes; and recommends it as a point of honour (as fantastick and ridiculous indeed, as it is mischievous) to thirst for blood, to add to the number of disconsolate widows and helpless orphans, and for private subjects to redress their own grievances, and both to judge and punish offenders, against the fundamental laws of all regular societies.

Let us change the example once more, and suppose it to be the character of this same age, to speak of the rational principle in man in terms of very great regard and distinction, to be fond, both in their discourses and writings, to magnify its dignity, to expatiate on its
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high original, its noble properties, and superior excellence above the animal and sensitive nature; as its employments are more sublime and honourable, and its pleasures more solid, generous, and lasting. The age, of which this is a just description, must surely blush and be confounded, unless it has utterly extinguished every modest and ingenuous impression; if, with all these exalted speculations, and magnifying encomiums, on the privileges and pleasures of reason, it gives way to a soft effeminate gaiety, and is abandoned to luxury and lewdness; which obscure the light, and destroy the influence, of reason, and allow to sense, and brutal appetite, the supreme command.

All these are obvious truths, where there are the least remains of sedateness, and impartial thought. But, indeed, if we ourselves are grossly tainted, our self-love and partiality in our own favour, joined with the force of bad habits, may very much bias and darken our judgment. Let us therefore, in imagination, substitute some upright judges, who are entirely out of the scene of corruption,
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and let them be told, that there were a people, enlightened in all respects as this age has been represented, and I believe imagines itself, to be, who, notwithstanding their just reasonings concerning the nature of God, and the honourable opinion which they expressed of his perfections and providence, neither revered his sovereign power and greatness, nor rendered him that love, adoration, and gratitude, which are due to his absolute and universal goodness; neither imitated his example, nor were solicitous about securing his favour, nor afraid of incurring his displeasure; and who, though they acknowledged the immutable obligations of justice and fidelity, and notwithstanding their seemingly disinterested and generous lectures of benevolence, scrupled not the violence of the adulterer, nor the blasting of virgin innocence, and robbing it of its purity and honour; nor were moved by the wants of the poor, and the sighs of the afflicted and disconsolate: if, I say, impartial judges, who had never been witnesses to any examples of such unnatural and surprising inconsistency, were to be told, that a people,
who

who valued themselves on their exact knowledge of religion and morality, acted so scandalous and indecent a part: they must think it scarcely credible, and would be led to suspect that the account was greatly aggravated; either to vilify human nature itself, or by national prejudices, by the spleen of parties, or private malice.

Should it be said, that the case, which I have put, is really strained, and heightened by too strong colours, because there never was any nation of men so universally depraved; I answer, that as it is possible, in the nature of the thing itself, that such degeneracy and flagrant corruption of manners may be universal, from the same causes through which it happens in a single instance; it cannot be improper to represent the case, even though it never actually happened, in order to display the general argument, which I am now pursuing, in a more clear and lively view. Besides, we may fairly draw this conclusion from it, which is directly to our present purpose: that, as vice cannot be infamous when it is universal, unless it be so likewise in every particular example of it; exactly in proportion

portion to the number of instances, as well as to the degree of excess, in which it prevails, it must bring shame and disgrace along with it; and ought therefore, in every shape, to be avoided with a generous indignation and contempt, and to be banished out of all nations, where any knowledge of religion, any sense of virtue and morality, and the outward appearances of civility are retained.

I know not how it happens, but so it is in these parts of the world, that with refinements of knowledge, there have advanced, almost in equal degrees, refinements in luxury. The poor heathens, following the sole guidance of nature, and being rude and untaught in this as well as other arts of life, were contented with what the necessities of nature required; and for this, we have thought fit to call them savages. And yet, for a much worse conduct in my opinion, that is, for contriving new ways of gratifying the animal part to the prejudice and dishonour of the rational, new ways of enfeebling the strength and vigour of the mind, of inflaming the passions, and trifling away life in empty ostentation,
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we style ourselves polite. Whereas, in truth, outward forms of politeness are capricious and variable; and then only is it a name of any valuable significance, when human nature itself is polished; when the soul is purged from all habits of wickedness, and adorned with good dispositions, and the appetites are kept in a regular state of subjection. So that a life spent in wantonness and luxury, and giving a loose to sensual inclinations, is so far from being the natural dictate of wisdom, and a good understanding, that it is a scandalous irregularity, for which ignorance is the best and only excuse; and ought to be confined to those barbarous nations, if there are any such, who, for want of better instruction, have no hope of immortality, no idea of intellectual and moral pleasures, nor of any thing higher than sense and animal gratifications. And thus it appears, upon the whole, that the knowledge and practice of religion are in reason, and common decency, inseparably connected; and that if we pretend to an enlightened mind, and right sentiments of virtue and piety, and pursue, at the same time, immoral and licentious courses, we are not only

only more criminal, but much more despicable, if our pretence be just, than either the vicious without knowledge, or the ignorant without vice.

Let us then answer the character which we assume, and shew ourselves to be, indeed, children of light, by a conduct that will bear the light of reason, by actions, as well as principles, that will approve them to be right, upon a cool and unbiassed examination. Let us shew that our notions of morality are really refined, by an exemplary propriety and strictness of behaviour; and by excelling especially in those virtues which are the most ornamental parts of the moral and christian character: that we may not be believers, and civilized persons, merely in speculation and profession; but appear like infidels, and barbarians, in our practice. Let us shew, that we understand our relation to the Supreme Being, and have a becoming sense of his infinite excellencies; by an inward, humble, and affectionate veneration and esteem of him, a calm and absolute submission to his providence, and all the just expressions of a genuine and unaffected piety: that we understand our relation to the
rest

rest of mankind; by an uninterrupted course of probity, truth, generosity, and mercy: that we understand the true value of human nature; by doing nothing that will eclipse and debase its dignity, by avoiding the mean and sordid pursuits of avarice, every excess of the inferior appetites, and all unmanly pleasures. In a word, let us shew, that we believe the reasonableness of religion, by conforming to the rules of it; and not be so strangely absurd as to recommend, and plead for, a rational religion, which we do not think it fit for us to practise: for by this means, the name of reason is rendered frightful to the weak and injudicious; and the name of piety is ridiculed by the libertine. But then shall we be able, with a good grace, to defend the cause of religion by our arguments, when we adorn it by our example. We shall silence the clamours of the ignorant, and soften the prejudices of the vicious. We shall be applauded by ourselves, and esteemed by others. We shall be supported under the various exigencies of life, and fortified against the terrors of death. For if we maintain our character with such consistency and honour, we
may,

may, with a serene and undaunted confidence, look forward to that awful day, in which the eternal God, appearing in supreme glory and majesty, will equitably decide the fate of all mankind, and “render to every one according to his deeds.” When they, who have made a suitable improvement of the light and advantages which they here enjoyed, shall be crowned with “glory, and honour, and immortality;” but “that servant, who knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.”

S E R M O N VI.

THE NATURAL GROUNDS AND MEASURES
OF CHARITY.

I SAMUEL XXV. 10, 11. *SWER*

And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?

IT requires a great degree of virtue to preserve a modest and humane temper in a state of affluence. We see our fortunes

tunes entirely formed by outward causes: the chance of birth, a train of accidents, or the course of our own conduct places some in wealth and others in poverty. And it requires more reflection, than we care to give ourselves in the ease and comfort of enjoyment, to look beyond the visible means of our subsistence for the direction of a superior will in these allotments. It is no less grating to our pride, in the complacency of an exalted situation, to consider those, as creatures of the same value with ourselves, whom we see below us, toiling in meaner offices for our convenience.

But as these views of life are unfavourable to the cause of humanity, it may be worth our while to look deeper into the matter; to enquire into the natural foundation of the several orders of men, and to trace up charity to its original source.

The greatest happiness we are capable of, plainly lies in a state of society. In the unconnected state of savage equality, individuals, if they could subsist at all by their own rude self-instructed efforts, must raise the necessaries of life with difficulty, and possess them under the perpetual

petual fear of yielding to the first invader of superior policy or strength. Society enlarges the sphere of enjoyment. It infinitely multiplies the comforts of life by the circulation of mutual services and inventions; and gives them stability by its protection. For this reason, equal as we are in the essential privileges of nature, it is expedient we should be distinguished from one another in the external circumstances of condition. Some must be laid under the necessity of labour, the natural source of our conveniences; and others must have leisure and influence and authority to watch over the security of possession.

At the same time, this disparity of circumstances is really no evil in itself; self-enjoyment being nearly equal in all conditions. The cares of greatness, compared with the peace, the sound sleep, and chearful health of labour, leave one little to boast of, and the other to repine at; did not our folly estimate happiness by glitter rather than inward satisfaction.

But from this constitution, however wisely adapted to the general happiness of man, the evil of distressed poverty must occasionally arise. For in a system,
made

made up of a great variety of parts descending below one another in a gradual chain of subordination, there must be several, barely removed above want, living upon the regular issues and returns of their industry. When, therefore, from the common frailty of our contexture, infirmities invade their bodies, they must of course fall into distress. As free creatures we must be governed by general laws: for were there not a settled course of things to give particular actions their determinate consequences, there could be no call to industry, forecast, or contrivance. And general laws, amidst the infinite multiplicity of particular cases, will accidentally hurt individuals, while they serve the common advantage. Free creatures will sometimes make a wrong use of their powers. And by the connection subsisting between us no one can suffer without involving others in his fate. The evil of poverty, therefore, arises from the very constitution of society; and, as this is calculated for the general happiness, we may consider all sufferers as really so many sacrifices to the public utility.

But

But what is still of greater importance, we must consider this as the appointment of God. Amidst the numerous proofs of a Providence, I cannot help considering the system of man, irregular as it is, as bearing the obvious marks of divine direction.

Is it wisdom to adapt means to ends? Here is the greatest of ends, the general welfare of mankind, provided for, by various classes wonderfully conspiring, by their mutual dependence and subserviency, to form a regular connected community. Do some by folly or misfortune sink from their natural pre-eminence in this constitution? Others, by a frugal cast, superior talents, and other methods, are raised to take their places, and prevent the system from falling into confusion. Would it create the most fatal convulsions, if the orders were left to the competitions of self-love, under a fortuitous cast of talents and inclinations? We come into the world with a diversity of capacities and tempers, adapting us to the several departments of civil life; and leading us, almost necessarily, to make different choices and engage in different pursuits. Would society notwithstanding

these provisions, still fall to pieces, if there were not some common principle or bond of union? We are placed under the strongest; the necessity of mutual dependence. The great, in spite of their pride, must protect the poor upon whose labours they subsist; and the poor, in spite of their envy, respect the great, under whose patronage the fruits of their labours are enjoyed. There is no one, who is not indebted to the united power of the whole for his safety, and the labours of the different arts for his conveniences. We can visibly trace the subsistence of a day to the contributions of many different orders: and if we consider the remoter multitudes, that must still depend upon them in continued progression, and the support which we all receive in common from the ascending orders, we shall have some faint idea of the extent as well as utility of civil association. And that we might not forget mankind amidst the narrowness of local societies, we see the comforts of life scattered in different countries and climates; in order to point out an universal community, and to lay us under the necessity of cultivating it by the civilizing arts of commerce.

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Let us only reflect: the unbeliever himself acknowledges wisdom and design in the order and regularity of the material world. Allow man must be a free agent, and here are greater marks of order and contrivance. How astonishingly great must it be, to form a complicated machine, as wide as human nature, consisting of millions of free creatures, acting separately upon private interest with distinct and opposite views, and yet compelled by the difference of their powers, inclinations, and necessities to act like so many regular movements for the general welfare: compacted and held together by these secret, imperceptible, I had almost said, imaginary relations, which leave them free and yet bind them with the firmness of links of iron, which the outrages of free-will may disturb but cannot destroy!

These observations, if they are not perhaps too abstracted, open to us the natural grounds and measures of charity. While they teach us that the distinctions of life are to be preserved, and that self-love, domestic attachments, and all honest arts of acquiring and preserving fortunes are not only innocent but laudable,

as being the real supports of civil association ; they point out our unhappier brethren, at the same time, as objects of our tenderest compassion.

For when a man, wrapped up in the fordid narrow circle of private interest or pleasure, cries, " Who is David, and who " is the son of Jesse ? who are the poor " and what are they to me ? shall I give " unto men, whom I know not whence " they are ? " he disclaims acquaintance with those who are united to him in the closest relation.

Recall our former idea of savage equality. Imagine mankind turned loose into this state, over-reaching, destroying, and preying upon one another ; every one living solitary and unbefriended, exposed to ruffian violence, fearful, suspicious, and jealous of an enemy in every creature he meets. Compare with this the peace, the security, the multiplied conveniences, we receive from the concurrent offices of associated numbers. Go on, and consider how weak and impotent every individual is in himself. He enters into life helpless in infancy : and the care of others nurses him to maturity. He grows helpless again in advanced years,

years, the second infancy of man; and the same friendly care supports him as he totters off the stage. In his full maturity of strength he is subject to pains which the skill of others must remove, or their tenderness alleviate; and to wants, which their labours or friendship must supply. When a man has struck the deepest root, when he rears his head the highest, and defies the storms of fortune, yet then as the stateliest tree is fed by the meaner fibres of the root that lie below in the earth, so he oweth his whole strength and verdure to the labours of his inferior fellow creatures.

Now upon this view, does not gratitude and justice incline us to the charitable conclusion: that as we owe our happiness to society, and distress arises from social subordinations, that part of us, who are happy by this constitution, owe assistance to the meanest member of it; as one who contributes to our felicity, as one who suffers by our enjoyments?

The case, indeed, of the useless part of a community is a forcible objection. For they, who do no service, have no returns to expect. And the selfish man, to put a fair colour upon his inhumanity,

pretends that all distresses belong to this class; that distresses are wholly of our own creation. "Many servants now a days," says he, "break away from their masters and lawful occupations, and bring misery upon themselves by their folly, idleness, and other vices." But the plea is false: much misery, as we saw before, arises necessarily from the social constitution. And as for voluntary irregularities, which will also arise, it is our duty to prevent them, as far as possible, by salutary regulations. The resolution of the case, I think, is this: the industrious poor have an indisputable right to a comfortable provision: the idle and worthless to a relief suitable to their circumstances; that is, such a relief as tends by a mixture of discipline and religious instruction to correct their vices, and dispel their ignorance, the great parent of vices, in the lower orders, and in short to reclaim them to the purposes of their creation. For till men have by outrage actually forfeited their right to the protection of society, they must be considered as a part of it, and have a claim to its offices.

The obligation encreases upon us, when
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we come to consider further, that this constitution is the appointment of the common Creator, who is the giver of riches, and expecteth they should be laid out agreeably to his will.

Charity is commonly considered as an arbitrary discretionary duty. But I know no difference between charity and strict justice but this, that justice has a fixed, determinate, invariable object, and may therefore be made the subject of human laws: but that charity varies according to the indeterminable extent of sufferings and abilities, and must therefore be left to every man's own conscience. At the same time, if there be (as we all agree there is) a Supreme Governor, who is capable of over-looking our consciences, and hath commanded charity in full proportion to what conscience itself must pronounce to be our abilities; it becomes then matter of strict justice and indispensable obligation.

I know how averse nature is to consider those fortunes as a trust, which we honour with the name of independence. But it is the pride of nature, and the fallacy of language. To be raised above the capricious humours of fellow crea-

tures is possible indeed : and it is a comfort : it is one of the blessings of affluence. But to consider wealth as a mere instrument of self-enjoyment, in order to feed the insatiate eye of avarice, or to pamper our lusts in all the wantonness of expence ; to think ourselves at liberty (as it is said of the great Leviathan in the waters) to sport and take our pastime therein, attentive to nothing but our own private gratifications, is claiming an impossible independence. To be so independent, we must go out of the government of God.

Yet this is the uncharitable man's folly : " Shall I take, says he, my bread, " and my water, and my flesh, that I " have provided for my own convenience, and give unto men whom I " know not whence they are ? " Infatuated man ! those outward causes, to which you ascribe your fortunes, are but the instruments, as I shewed you before, by which God is pleased to govern the world, and by which he hath given you your possessions. " Beware " (saith the Mosaic law with equal truth and eloquence, " Beware) " that thou say in thine heart, my power " and the might of my arm hath gotten " me

“me this wealth. But thou shouldest
“remember the Lord thy God: for it is
“he that giveth thee the power to get
“wealth.” For comes it by thine own
industry? It was he that gave thee that
health, capacity, and opportunity, that
enable thee to prosper above thy meaner
brethren. Comes it from the industry
of thy forefathers by the regular trans-
mission of inheritance? It was his fa-
vour that thou wert born of this rather
than that parent: for, “he made us and
not we ourselves.” It was his providence
that appointed and still supporteth those
general laws, which transmitted thy inhe-
ritance to thy possession: for he not only
“made us;” but “we are his people
and the sheep of his pasture.”

Now doth not God teach us by his ap-
pointment of things both the obligation
and measures of beneficence? that the
few, who suffer for the benefit of the
world, should be relieved from the ful-
ness of the happier multitude? that they
should be relieved with tenderness, as
fellow creatures equal by nature and e-
qually dear in the common maker’s im-
partial eye; and with discretion, as crea-
tures

tures still placed below us for the wisest purposes of order ?

No other sort of relief deserves the name : relief, arising from the uncertain impulses of humour, like irregular interrupted showers, answers not the general exigences of want. The spendthrift's profusion, breaking the order of nature, falls, like the thunder-shower, exhausting itself by its violence, and doing no permanent service ; destroying, rather than refreshing ; falling where least wanted, among the pests and nuisances of society, but seldom reaching the silent obscurity of modest want. Whereas true charity founded in sentiment is (if I may pursue the metaphor) a shower in due season ; prompted by goodness, regulated by prudence, and directed by discretion, it always falls where there is need, nor disables itself for the beneficent discharge upon all future occasions.

Indeed the Creator seems to teach us this charity by the silent language of all his works. We find nothing made merely for its own use : pre-eminence in nature is but the pre-eminence of doing good. If the heavenly bodies (for instance) roll in superior splendor over our heads, it is but

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to spread heat, and light, and comfort more widely in their course: if the mountains rise above the plains, and receive the dews of heaven in greater abundance, it is only to collect and disperse them in plenty over the inferior plains: if the ocean receives the tributary rivers from every country; it is to return them again in refreshing vapours, and to recruit the fountains that support its greatness. Carry your view in the same manner through the tribes of animal and vegetable life, and you find the same order and connection. Ascend to man: and God hath done the same for him; having formed an astonishing arrangement and œconomy in the general distributions of society. More he cannot do, consistently with our freedom; but points out to us, through all these works of his, what he expects from our freedom towards supporting and completing the beautiful connexion.

But whatever weight these silent intimations carry along with them; the argument, drawn from the social affections, I think, amounts to demonstration. It is this. There is a good-nature in the frame of man, that constantly connect-

eth him with his fellow-creatures, where meaner instincts do not prevail; participating in their joys, and feeling their misfortunes. We must do violence to ourselves, to restrain it; to indulge it is the sweetest of pleasures.

In the cool impartial review of history, who takes not part with injured innocence? Who does not the same in actual life, where his own interests are not strongly concerned? Who curses not the cruel, even amidst the threats of power and the glare of splendid rapine? We read of a cruel tyrant of antiquity, who oppressed and murdered his subjects without remorse, and yet melted into tears at the imaginary distress of theatric representation. What was this but the honest triumph of nature? Evil habits may now and then smother the amiable instincts of the soul; but in some ingenuous moment she will discover her better tendency. Passions may now and then, like a hurricane, overbear the powers of reflection; but when the storm subsides, benevolence breaks forth again, and surveys the wreck with remorse and horror.

View this instinct in the indulgence;
and

and what gives so sincere and permanent a pleasure? Do we weep with those that weep? There is a pleasure in catching the soft infection, and a refreshment in discharging the social torrent. Do we feed the hungry? We share in the repast, and feel the most exquisite luxury, when we see joy rekindled in the meagre face of want. Do we cloathe the naked? And do we not feel a glow of transport over-spread ourselves, when we see a poor fellow creature comforting himself in the warmth of our fleece? Other pleasures vanish with the enjoyment; and if sinful, leave a bitterness upon the mind: but the memory of generous actions is a fund of comfort for every period of life, and will support the mind in that hour of need, the hour of death, when all other comforts forsake us. In the mean time, it is health and enjoyment: the heart expands in the consciousness of doing good: the stream of life flows with recruited vigor: the mind feels a complacency and self approbation, that gives a relish to every other satisfaction.

The selfish man, I know, will laugh at these pleasures, and with an air of superior sagacity inform us, that he sees
all

all wise men act, as he does, upon private interest, whatever be their pretences. But the answer is short: there is a distinction between the self-interest of prudence and immoderate desire; and, if the latter destroys benevolence in some cases, it disproves not the general instinct.

We may perhaps see the force of this argument very clearly in the following comparison: God sends us helpless infants into the world; and we see he has implanted a natural instinct in the parent prompting him to assist the helplessness of infancy. We all see the relation in this instance: the miser owns it; for his pretence is to provide for his children. In the same manner does the common Creator leave some of his creatures poor and destitute. Why have we benevolent affections implanted in us, if we are not to exercise them in the relief of distress? Why are we not criminal, in proportion to the degrees of relation, for neglecting the similar instinct of compassion, equally founded in nature? The voluptuary, again, insists upon his right to follow pleasure. Let him also pursue his principle, and he will find himself acting contrary to nature; when,

when; neglecting the superior pleasures of doing good, he swallows up his whole wealth in the joyless gulph of private gratification.

Whatever force these arguments have in proving riches to be a real and important trust, the gospel puts it beyond doubt or dispute. We live here in a state of discipline. The various conditions, that are so wisely contrived for our general comfort, are the trials of our obedience. The poor are tried in the virtues of honest industry and resignation; the rich in the temperate and charitable use of their wealth. There is not a mite of those over-grown possessions, which the great ones of the earth consider as the instruments of their vices and follies, which they must not give the strictest account of to omniscience.

But let us avoid superstitious scruples. The gospel, agreeing with the general views of nature, alloweth the primary demands of self-love, the claims of domestic relation, and supposes a difference of ranks and orders.

There is another allowance to be made. By the peculiar humanity of our laws there is no man of property, who cannot
consider

consider himself as employing part of his fortunes in charitable uses. For, while the national provision for the poor does honour to our public spirit, by raising the disabled above the misery of precarious maintenance, every man can make his legal proportion a charity by the cheerfulness of his contribution. Men of rank and office may turn it into the most valuable charity, by taking care to see the laws executed with an humanity equal to their spirit. There are numerous inconveniences attending establishments left merely to mercenary care, which the interposition of superiors only can prevent or remove.

But this provision, however managed, will not answer the distresses of mankind. Misery will break in from a thousand sources, which no laws can foresee or provide for. Whenever, then, such an object presenteth itself; when you can, by a little seasonable relief, preserve a worthy man, pursued by a train of misfortunes, and enable him to recover, and go comfortably and usefully through life; when you can, by your contribution, rescue an orphan-family from hunger and nakedness, from the wretched alternative

native of either perishing for want, or taking the mischievous paths of vagrant idleness ; when you can give servants to your God, and useful members to your country, by implanting in them early and lasting habits of piety and industry ; when you can, by your contribution, restore a laborious useful man, deprived of his limbs and health in the service of mankind (for this is the case of every industrious man ; when you can restore him) to himself, to his family, to the community, and prevent the complicated misery of the many depending on his honest labours ; when, I say, any such object presenteth itself to your relief, and you cannot retrench from your lusts, from your superfluities, nay from your conveniences ; there is an abuse of wealth, if the world is governed by a Being of mercy and compassion.

Hast thou, O God, made all of the same nature, stamped alike with thy sacred image, and impressed with the same desire of happiness ; and shall so many of thy creatures languish in hopeless misery ? Their neighbours lend not a hand to relieve them ; they see them without pity ; they spurn them from their doors ; they
mock

mock at their misfortunes. Must the complaint of the poor be forgotten forever?

Surely no: the moralist is wrong, who, telling us that "partial evil is universal good" leaves misery without hope in death. "For my part (the christian moralist better concludes) if there were but one instance of unfortunate virtue and prosperous wickedness, it would be to me an argument for a future state: because God cannot be unjust or unreasonable in any one instance."

We see, we hear of, numerous instances of this kind. The uncharitable man multiplies them by his cruelty, and becomes an argument against himself; being a certain visible demonstration of the necessity of a more equal state.

Since then, my christian brethren, it appears upon so many clear and irresistible principles, that our fortunes are a real trust; it certainly becomes us to consider what account we can give of them in the great day of enquiry. "I gave thee power; I gave thee riches: I placed below thee many, who are equally dear to me, to toil for thy convenience: what hast thou done to repay my goodness,"

“ness, and to reward their labours? I
“took upon me the cause of these virtu-
“ous poor: I placed them in the world
“for the exercise of their patience, and
“the trial of thy obedience. Give an ac-
“count of those talents, which I commit-
“ted to thy trust.”

If, in that important hour, our conscience upbraids us, that we hoarded up with avarice, or spent upon our lusts that wealth, which we owed to temperance and charity; how can we face the consequent expostulation?

“I gave *you* every thing amply to en-
“joy: I cloathed you with the riches of
“my creation: yet I was naked and pe-
“rishing in the person of these poor,
“whom I trusted to your relief, and you
“denied to my nakedness the superfluities
“of your pride. I gave you every beast
“of the field for your support: every ele-
“ment contributed to crown your tables
“with plenty: yet I was hungry and thir-
“sty, and ye denied me the refuse that
“fell from the tables of your riot and in-
“temperance. I gave you health and
“peace and security: the voice of mirth
“and joy resounded in your dwellings:
“yet I was sick, and ye took me not in;
“in

“in prison, and ye visited me not ; while
 “you squandered away my gifts upon
 “your lusts and vices.”

What follows,—I need not mention in a christian audience. But it is certain, the state of happiness, designed for us hereafter, is a place, where flesh and blood with its pollutions cannot enter, where love and peace and benevolence are the reigning tempers.

Blessed then is the man, who prepares himself, in this his day of grace, for that future inheritance ; that he may receive the final approbation, which the good and charitable can only receive, which will be of more value than millions of worlds ; “Well done, thou good and
 “faithful servant, thou hast been faithful in a few things, I will make thee
 “ruler over many things : enter thou
 “into the joy of thy Lord.”

S E R M O N VII.

ON SETTING BOUNDS TO OUR DESIRES.

2 KINGS iv. 13.

*And he said unto him, Say now unto her,
Behold, thou hast been careful for us
with all this care; what is to be done
for thee? Wouldest thou be spoken for
to the king, or to the captain of the host?
And she answered, I dwell among mine
own people.*

THE first part of the text is the
words which the prophet Elisha
puts into the mouth of his servant Ge-
hazi

hazi, as a message of thanks to the woman of Shunem for her great kindness and hospitality, of which, after the acknowledgment of his just sense, which Gehazi is bid to deliver in the words, "Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care;" he directs him to enquire in what manner he may best make a return in discharge of the obligation; "What shall be done for thee?" "Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?" The last part of the text is the Shunamite's answer, which implies a refusal of the honour or advantage which the prophet intended to bring upon her by such an application, which she indirectly expresses in her contentment and satisfaction, with what she enjoyed in her present station; "I dwell amongst mine own people." This instance of self-denial in the Shunamite, is but properly the introduction to her story, and gives rise to that long and very pathetic transaction which follows, in the supernatural grant of a child, which God had many years denied her; the affecting loss of him as soon as he was grown up, and his restoration to life by Elisha, after he had been some time dead;

dead; the whole of which, is extremely interesting, and contains such incidents as would afford sufficient matter for instruction; but as it will not fall within the intention of this discourse, I shall beg leave, at this time, barely to consider those previous circumstances of it, to which the text confines me, upon which I shall enlarge with such reflections as occur, and then proceed to that practical use and exhortation, which will naturally arise from it.

We find that after Elisha had rescued the distressed widow and her two sons from the hands of the creditor, by the miraculous multiplication of her oil: he passed on to Shunem, where we read, was a great woman, and she constrained him to eat bread; and so it was, that as often as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. The sacred historian speaks barely of her temporal condition and station in life, "That she " was a great woman;" but describes not the more material part of her, her virtues and character, because they were more evidently to be discovered from the transaction itself, from which it appears, that she was not only wealthy, but like-
wise

wife charitable, and of a very considerate turn of mind. For after many repeated invitations and entertainments at her house, finding his occasions called him to a frequent passage that way, she moves her husband to set up and furnish a lodging for him, with all the conveniencies which the simplicity of those times required: "And she said unto her husband, Behold now I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually; let us make him a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall, and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick; and it shall be when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither." She perceived he was a holy man, she had had many opportunities, as he passed by them continually, of observing his behaviour and deportment, which she had carefully remarked, and saw plainly what he was. That the sanctity and simplicity of his manners, the severity of his life, his zeal for the religion of his God, and the uncommon fervency of his devotion, when he worshipped before him, which seemed his whole business and employment upon earth;
all

all bespoke him not a man of this world, but one whose heart and affections were fixed upon another object, which was dearer and more important to him. But as such outward appearances may, and often have been counterfeited, so that the actions of a man are certainly the only interpreters to be relied on, whether such colours are true or false; so she had heard that all was of a piece there, and that he was throughout consistent: that he had never, in any one instance of his life, acted as if he had any views in the affairs of this world, in which he had never interested himself at all, but where the glory of his God, or the good and preservation of his fellow-creatures at first inclined him: that in a late instance, before he came to Shunem, he had done one of the kindest and most charitable actions that a good man could have done, in assisting the widow and fatherless; and as the fact was singular, and had just happened before her knowledge of him, no doubt she had heard the story with all the tender circumstances which a true report would give it in his favour; namely, that a certain woman, whose husband was lately dead, and had left her with

her children in a very helpless condition, very destitute, and what was still worse, charged with a debt she was not able to pay ; that her creditor bore exceeding hard upon her, and finding her little worth in substance, was coming to take the advantage which the law allowed of seizing her two sons for his bondsmen ; so that she had not only lost her husband, which had made her miserable enough already, but was going to be bereaved of her children, which were the only comfort and support of her life ; that upon her coming to Elisha with this sad story, he was touched with compassion for her misfortunes, and had used all the power and interest which he had with his God to relieve and befriend her, which in an unheard-of manner, by the miraculous encrease of her oil, which was the only substance she had left, he had so bountifully effected, as not only to disentangle her from her difficulties in paying the debt, but withal, what was still more generous, to enable her to live comfortably the remainder of her days. She considered, that charity and compassion was so leading a virtue, and had such an influence upon every other part of a man's

man's character, as to be a sufficient proof, by itself, of the inward disposition and goodness of the heart; but that so engaging an instance of it as this, exercised in so kind and seasonable a manner, was a demonstration of his, and that he was in truth what outward circumstances bespoke, a holy man of God. As the Shunamite's principle and motive for her hospitality to Elisha was just, as it sprung from an idea of the worth and merit of her guest, so likewise was the manner of doing it kind and considerate. It is observable, she does not solicit her husband to assign him an apartment in her own house, but to build him a chamber in the wall apart: she considered, that true piety wanted no witnesses, and was always most at ease when most private; that the tumult and distraction of a large family were not fit for the silent meditations of so holy a man, who would perpetually there meet with something either to interrupt his devotion, or offend the purity of his manners; that, moreover, under such an independent roof, where he could take shelter as often as his occasions required, she thought he might taste the pleasure which was natural to

man, in possessing something like what he could call his own, and, what is no small part of conferring a favour, he would scarce feel the weight of it, or at least much seldomer in this manner, than where a daily invitation and repetition of the kindness perpetually put him in mind of his obligation. If any thing could still add to this, it was, that it did not appear to be the dry offer of a faint civility, but that it came directly from the heart. There is a nicety in honest minds, which will not accept of a cold and suspected offer, and even when it appears to be sincere and truly meant, there is a modesty in true merit which knows not how to accept it; and no doubt she had one, if not both these difficulties to conquer in their turns. For we read, that she constrained him, and in all likelihood forced his acceptance of it with all the warmth and friendly openness of a humane and hospitable temper.

It is with benefits as with injuries in this respect, that we do not so much weigh the accidental good or evil they do us, as that which they were designed to do us. That is, we consider no part of them so much as their intention; and the

the prophet's behaviour consequent upon this, shews he beheld it through this medium, or in some such advantageous light as I have placed it.

There is no burthen so heavy to a grateful mind, as a debt of kindness unpaid; and we may believe Elisha felt it so, from the earnest desire which he had, upon the immediate receipt of this, to discharge himself of it, which he expresses in the text in the warmest manner: "Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care: what is to be done for thee? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?" There is a degree of honest impatience in the words, such as was natural to a good man, who would not be behind-hand with his benefactor. But there is one thing which may seem strange at first sight, that as her station and condition in life was such, that she appeared rather to have abounded already, than stood in want of any thing in this world which such an application could supply, why the prophet should not rather have proposed some spiritual advantage, which, as it would better have become the sanctity of his character on the one hand, so,

on the other, it would have done a more real and lasting service to his friend.

But we are to reflect, that in returning favours, we act differently from what we do in conferring them: in the one case, we simply consider what is best; in the other, what is most acceptable. The reason is, that we have a right to act according to our own ideas of what will do the party most good, in the case where we bestow a favour; but where we return one, we lose this right, and act according to his conceptions who has obliged us, and endeavour to repay in such a manner as we think is most likely to be accepted in discharge of the obligation. So that, though we are not to imagine Elisha could be wanting in religious duties, as well as wishes to so hospitable a friend, we may yet suppose, he was directed here by this principle of equity, and that, in reflecting in what manner he should requite his benefactress, he had considered, that to one of her affluent condition, who had all the reasonable comforts of an independent life, if there was any passion yet unsatisfied, it must certainly be ambition: that though in general it was an irregular appetite,

petite, which in most cases it was dangerous to gratify, yet, in effect, it was only so far criminal, as the power which is acquired was perverted to bad and vicious purposes, which it was not likely to be here, from the specimen she had already given of her disposition, which shewed, that if she did wish for an increase of wealth and honour, she wished it only, as it would enable her more generously to extend her arm in kind offices, and increase the power as well as the opportunities of doing good.

In justice to Elisha's motive, which must have been good, we must suppose, he considered his offer in this light; and what principally led him to propose it, was the great interest which he had with the king of Israel at that time, which he had merited by a signal service; and as he had no views for himself, he thought it could not be employed so well, as in establishing the fortune of one, whose virtue might be so safely trusted with it. It was a justifiable prepossession in her favour, though one not always to be relied on; for there is many a one, who in a moderate station, and with a lesser degree of power, has behaved with honour

and unblemished reputation, and who has even borne the buffetings of adverse fortune well, and manifested great presence and strength of mind under it, whom nevertheless a high exaltation has at once overcome, and so entirely changed, as if the party had left not only his virtue, but even himself behind him.

Whether the Shunamite dreaded to make this dangerous experiment of herself, or, which is more likely, that she had learned to set bounds to her desires, and was too well satisfied with her present condition, to be tempted out of it, she declines the offer in the close of the text; "I dwell amongst mine own people; as if she had said: The intended kindness is far from being small, but it is not useful to me; I live here, as thou art a witness, in peace, in a contented obscurity; not so high as to provoke envy, nor so low as to be trodden down despised. In this safe and middle state, as I have lived amongst mine own people, so let me die out of the reach, both of the cares and glories of the world. It is fit, O holy man of God! that I learn some time or other to set bounds to my desires; and if I cannot fix them now,
when

when I have already more than my wants require, when shall I hope to do it? Or how should I expect that even this increase of honour or fortune would fully satisfy and content my ambition, should I now give way to it?

So engaging an instance of unaffected moderation and self-denial, deserves well to be considered by the bustlers in this world; because, if we are to trust the face and course of things, we scarce see any virtue so hard to be put in practice, and which the generality of mankind seem so unwilling to learn, as this of knowing when they have enough, and when it is time to give over their worldly pursuits. Aye, but nothing is more easy, you will answer, than to fix this point, and set certain bounds to it. For my own part, you will say, I declare, I want and would wish no more, but a sufficient competency of those things which are requisite to the real uses and occasions of life, suitable to the way I have been taught to expect from use and education. But recollect how seldom it ever happens, when these points are secured, but that new occasions and new necessities present themselves, and every

day as you grow richer, fresh wants are discovered, which rise up before you, as you ascend the hill; so that every step you take, every accession to your fortune, sets your desires one degree further from rest and satisfaction: that something you have not yet grasped, and possibly never will; that phantom unpossessed and unpossessable, is perpetually haunting you, and stepping in betwixt you and your contentment. Unhappy creature! to think of enjoying that blessing without moderation; or to imagine that so sacred a temple can be raised upon the foundation of wealth or power! If the ground-work is not laid within your own mind, they will as soon add a cubit to your stature, as to your happiness. To be convinced it is so, pray look up to those who have got as high as their warmest wishes could carry them in this ascent, do you observe they live the better, the longer, the merrier, or that they sleep the sounder in their beds, for having twice as much as they wanted, or well know how to dispose of? Of all rules for calculating happiness, this is the most deceitful, and which few but weak minds, and those unpractised in the world too, ever think
of

of applying as the measure in such an estimation. Great and inexpressible may be the happiness, which a moderate fortune and moderate desires, with a consciousness of virtue, will secure. Many are the silent pleasures of the honest peasant, who rises chearful to his labour: why should they not? Look into his house, the seat of each man's happiness; has he not the same domestic endearments, the same joy and comfort in his children, and as flattering hopes of their doing well, to enliven his hours and glad his heart, as you could conceive in the highest station? And I make no doubt, in general, but if the true state of his joys and sufferings could be fairly balanced with those of his betters, whether any thing would appear at the foot of the account, but what would recommend the moral of this discourse. This, I own, is not to be attained to, by the cynical stale trick of haranguing against the goods of fortune; they were never intended to be talked out of the world: but as virtue and true wisdom lie in the middle of extremes, it is incumbent on us, on one hand, not to neglect and despise riches, so as to forget ourselves; and on the other, not to pur-

sue and love them so, as to forget God ;
to have them sometimes in our heads,
but always something more important in
our hearts.

S E R M O N VIII.

THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF
INTELLECTUAL DARKNESS.

MATTHEW vi. 23.

*If therefore the light that is in thee be
darkness, how great is that darkness!*

TO discover the meaning of these words, it will be requisite to look back upon the verse immediately foregoing; where, according to a figure of speech very common both in sacred and profane writers, we find a power and a disposition

position of the mind represented and illustrated, the one by a bodily organ, and the other by a corporeal affection. "The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." Transferring this to the mind, the question will be what we are to understand by the character of singleness here recommended: for that the eye of the mind denotes its faculty of perception and judgment, is needless to be observed or mentioned. The usual signification of the word *single* in the original, applied to the mind, is that of liberality and beneficence. And accordingly this sense of it seems to receive confirmation from the context; where we find inculcated a disregard of temporal treasures, and a perpetual preference of such as are eternal. But if we turn to the parallel passage in St. Luke, we find a different context, and that the expression is used on a different occasion: for there the application confronts the case of the unbelieving Jews, whose judgments were perverted by their corrupt affections, and gross prejudices. And indeed the primary, direct, and most natural signification of a "single eye,"

“eye,” in relation to the mind, seems to be that purity, integrity, and simplicity of judgment, which consists in being directed and governed solely by evidence, without regard to any other consideration. The sight of the mind is then properly single and undivided, when in the view of any case, or the examination of any question, it looks at nothing but evidence, and judges accordingly; without being influenced by any other regards or motives whatever. On the contrary, an evil eye, is an eye distempered, distorted, and depraved; and when spoken of the mind, denotes an understanding clouded with prejudices, and a judgment disturbed and disordered by sinister views, and irregular influences. These explications being premised, the meaning of my text becomes plain and obvious. If reason or understanding, which is the eye of the mind, and the light of the soul, be vitiated by prejudice, and blinded by partiality, the consequence is not only darkness instead of light, but darkness to a high degree; such as fills the mind with errors and absurdities, disorders and confusion. “If the light which is *in thee* be darkness, how great is *that* darkness!” In

In treating on which words, I shall endeavour to shew more particularly, first, how, and by what means, the mind of man is thus darkened and depraved; and, secondly, that degree and extent of this mischief, implied in the exclamation, "how great is that darkness!"

First, I am to shew, how, and by what means, the mind of man is thus darkened and depraved. It has already been observed, that the general causes of this mischief, are prejudice, partiality, and prepossession. But this is not enough. The grounds and occasions of men's prejudices should be more distinctly laid open. They are indeed very numerous, as well as various; and therefore I shall not pretend to consider them all. But, if I mistake not, the principal of them are reducible under the following heads; constitution, custom, authority, singularity, affection, interest. These seem to be the chief sources of prejudice, and the main occasion of partial and corrupt judgment. It may not therefore be improper to inquire briefly into them, and examine them in their order.

First, I observe that men's judgments are apt to be influenced by their respective consti-

constitutions. So intimate is the union between soul and body, that the operations of the former, in many respects, depend on the latter; not only as to its accidental state, but its original frame and temperature. Differences of constitution remarkably affect the understanding, unless great care be taken to prevent it: diversifying men's ways of thinking and judging, and producing oftentimes correspondent sentiments. Thus, for instance, a cool, phlegmatic habit naturally disposes men to be diffident and timorous in their decisions; to diminish all evidence, suspect all arguments, and represent them to disadvantage. On the other hand, a sanguine constitution frequently occasions rash opinions, and presumptuous conclusions; makes men impatient of attention, and by consequence precipitates their judgments. A copious flow of spirits is apt to magnify evidence, and sometimes stands instead of it; makes men take things for granted without proof; and when proof is offered, to admit of it, though immature and insufficient. The process of the mind being thus hurried, and examination precipitated, it easily takes
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up crude determinations, and groundless opinions. This inconvenience is much aggravated, where the temperament happens to be choleric as well as sanguine. For anger, in proportion to the degree wherein it prevails, not only disturbs, but darkens the mind; not only obstructs the intellectual powers, but frequently confounds them. As well might a man see objects distinctly in a hurricane, as perceive clearly, and judge accurately, in a storm of passion. In this case, men are usually so far from attending to evidence, that they tread it under their feet; so far from using their understandings in a regular way, that for the present, reason itself appears impertinent, and truth contemptible. I shall only add, that though these constitutional tendencies are really natural, yet the mischiefs thence arising are solely chargeable on ourselves. They cannot lead us into error, if we guard and govern them as we may do, and as we ought to do. If indeed we give the rein to our passions, no wonder if they run away with us. No man is born a slave to his constitution; and whoever makes himself such, the blame undoubtedly lies at his own door. He
may

may act wisely, and judge honestly, if he be careful and circumspect, and make use of those means which God has put into his power. And considering the helps afforded him, and that this life is a state of trial and discipline, there can be no just cause of complaint.

A second source of error is custom, a principle that is well known to have great force in warping men's minds, and fixing a bias on their understandings. When any set of opinions, maxims, or conclusions, have by long possession, become familiar to the mind, and taken root in it; they are seldom removed without violence and great difficulty. We are apt to consider and cherish them as old acquaintance, and to treat them accordingly with tenderness and respect. And whatever is advanced in opposition thereto, though perhaps an evident truth, is commonly rejected without examination. Hence many absurdities plead a kind of prescription; and old errors are fondly preferred to new truths. This is more remarkably the case, in respect of such opinions and sentiments as are imbibed early, and taught us in our childhood; as making then a deeper and more durable

rable impression. And hence it is that the prejudices of education are so hardly and so seldom conquered ; never indeed without great attention, strong resolution, and a vigorous effort of mind. It is almost needless to observe what powerful obstacles these are to the culture of the understanding ; it has been a matter of great and general complaint. The seeds of sound knowledge and instruction are sensibly choaked by them, in proportion to their number and growth ; and till the mind be carefully weeded, it seldom or never produces any valuable fruit. By these prejudices all kinds of truth are obstructed ; and their mischievous influence extends both to the precepts of philosophy, and the principles of religion, as well as to the maxims of common life : none of which can be fairly examined, or seen in a true light, till these prevailing prejudices be in a great measure subdued. Whatever points come before us, instead of considering them as they are in themselves, and searching for evidence alone with singleness and simplicity of mind ; our usual method is to compare them with such old notions and received opinions as are lying by us. If they

they agree with these, well and good; if they disagree, we suspect them immediately, and perhaps scarce think them worth our attention. And indeed it must be confessed, that no one truth can be repugnant to any other truth. But our great misfortune, or rather our great fault is, that whatever we have taken into our minds, and kept there for some time, we are apt to take it for granted must be a stock of neat truth, without the least mixture of error. The consequence of which is, that whatever squares not therewith, we unavoidably look upon as erroneous and absurd. And many of our fixed notions being mere prejudices, it naturally comes to pass, that while few truths gain admittance, errors increase and multiply continually. Nor can it be otherwise, while we measure thus by a false and deceitful rule; and instead of being guided by evidence, are governed by custom. This then is manifestly one cause, and that a powerful one, of the mischievous effects spoken of in my text: forasmuch as it visibly tends, and notoriously contributes, to darken mens minds, and deprave their judgments.

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Another nearly allied to this, is authority. That is, in effect, an undue deference and attachment to great names and venerable characters, considered merely as such. Instead of inquiring after evidence, and examining for themselves the merits of any cause, men are exceedingly prone to take things upon trust, to follow blindly the sentiments of their superiors, or the principles of their ancestors. The argument, or rather apology, of the unbelieving Jews, for rejecting our Saviour, and disowning his mission, was entirely founded hereon. "Have any, say they, of the rulers or pharisees believed on him?" On this account they thought it needless to examine his credentials, or search for evidence. It was sufficient for them, that he met with opposition from those who, it seems, guided their judgments, and governed their consciences. And yet the very men, in whom they thus confided, were so far from being impartial and sincere in their determinations, that they were entirely under the direction of their own prejudices and passions. And thus "the blind led the blind," and the love of darkness generally prevailed. Great
pity

pity it is, that such an example as this should ever have been followed by christians. But, alas! this has been too often the case. Though christianity utterly discountenances, and expressly condemns, implicit faith, and a blind submission to authority; yet very many of its professors have been unaccountably drawn into it, to the dishonour of their religion, and even the disgrace of human understanding. Hence they have been involved in a thick mist of ignorance, and sat in darknefs from age to age. It is moreover very observable, what respect and reverence men generally pay to their forefathers; though it be at the expence of reason and religion: I mean, in adhering strictly to their principles and persuasions, whatever they be. A practice familiar to all sects and parties, to all distinctions and denominations. Whatever opinions our ancestors maintained, whatever religion, or communion, they embraced, it is a hundred to one that we embrace and persist in the same. We seem indeed to look upon them as part of our inheritance, and to think ourselves bound to transmit them, unaltered and untouched, to those that come after us.

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There are indeed instances to the contrary, but those instances are so rare, as to be matter of surprise and wonder, whenever they happen. Most certain it is, that we should never change without good grounds, much less for changing sake. But nevertheless, if we can give no better reason for our being christians, or protestants, or members of any particular communion, than that our fathers were so before us, our religion is doubtless poorly founded. The very same reason may be given by papists, Jews, Mahometans, and pagans : and if it be a bad reason in them, as it certainly is, it can never be a good one in us. But however absurd it may and must appear, whenever we consider it, the fact is visible and notorious. Instead of searching diligently for the right way, our method is to proceed in a beaten track. Instead of keeping the eye of our minds clear and single, we are often content to have it shut, and to follow our leaders hoodwinked. It is easy to discover, how unchristian and unmanly such a practice is ; and how it naturally tends both to the corruption of religion, and the depravation of reason. A blind adherence to
author-

authority, is so far from being consistent with either of them, that it is destructive of both. For both of them essentially require, that men consider and judge for themselves. And when they have tried and proved things as well as they are able, then to chuse and "hold fast that which is good." Authority then not only perverts men's judgments, but, as far as it reaches, renders them useless. It not only darkens the mind, but tends to perpetuate that darkness. For what occasion have men for light, or what inducement to desire it, while they propose nothing but to follow blindfold those that go before them? By judging for themselves, and according to evidence, men greatly improve their minds, and strengthen their faculties; promote truth, preserve liberty; but a servile resignation to authority, is void of all merit, and fruitful of all mischief. It cramps men's talents, disables their understandings, and in the room of a rational assent, introduces a blind faith, and intellectual stupidity. In short, it directly tends to the promotion and establishment of ignorance, darkness, slavery, and superstition. But while we are

guarding against this evil, we must not overlook the opposite extreme. For such is the next principle that I proposed to consider: I mean a vain affectation of singularity, which is likewise an enemy to sound judgment, and another great obstruction to light and truth.

If many men are too prone and easy to be led, others are as willing and desirous to lead; as aiming oftentimes not so much at truth, as glory and distinction. While the one are too tenacious of beaten roads, and like to follow the multitude; the other search for new ways, and industriously strike out into by-paths of their own. They look upon it as a mark of a vulgar understanding to join in sentiment, and concur in judgment, with the generality of mankind, and accordingly are apt to treat all popular opinions, and common ways of thinking, with contempt and disdain. But where is the wisdom of such a proceeding? Why should any man wish to distinguish himself at the expence of reason and truth? Is not this a mere prejudice as well as the former? If authority shuts men's eyes, will not vanity make them see double? In the one case, they

they make little or no uſe of their faculties; in the other, they abuſe and pervert them. However, ignorance and darkneſs is the natural effect of both. If we would really come to the knowledge of the truth, we muſt look at evidence, and nothing but evidence. On this alone the eye is to be fixed. It is nothing to the purpoſe to inquire or conſider, how many are for ſuch a point, or how many are againſt it. For the concurrence of numbers is neither a proof, nor a diſproof. If it will not paſs, as indeed it ought not, for an argument of truth; certainly it ought not to paſs for an argument of falſhood. If the general judgment be often wrong, yet ſurely it may be right; and, in many caſes, undoubtedly is ſo. It is therefore equally abſurd ſo to adhere to it, or depart from it, without other grounds. When truth and reaſon are on one ſide of a queſtion, and popular opinion of another; ſingularity is wiſdom and worth: but on any other ſuppoſition, weakneſs and folly. To affect it, and aim at it, is neither agreeable to the precepts of virtue, nor the rules of good ſenſe: and however men may diſtinguiſh themſelves by it, it is, in reality,

lity, at their own cost. For, whatever they may imagine, it will never procure them the approbation and esteem of wise men; who, far from admiring it, will be sure to condemn it. But what we are more immediately concerned with at present, is the ill effect of it in darkening the mind, and depraving the judgment: and this is done by drawing them aside, and giving them a false bias in their pursuits and inquiries. Instead of regarding nothing but truth, and the evidence of truth, they are influenced by a foreign motive; which alters objects and opinions, and presents things to the mind in a deceitful light. Hence singular notions are supported and maintained, as most agreeable to the end in view, and the real evidence of things is artfully concealed, and kept out of sight. In short, nothing is, or can be fairly weighed, while vanity holds the scale: so far from it, that the lightest opinions frequently prevail, while the most solid truths are found wanting.

Another source of prejudice, is inclination or affection of any kind. To which may be added, as operating the same way, the contrary principle of dislike and disaf-

disaffection. When one side of a question pleases, and the other displeases, how difficult is it to be perfectly impartial? When the evidence is defective on the agreeable side, how ready are we to supply it out of our own imaginations? And how dextrous in working it up to our wishes? Bare possibilities we can magnify into probabilities, and probabilities into certainties. Nay, such is our skill and success in deceiving ourselves, that palpable errors and absurdities shall be dressed up into the appearance of specious and plausible truths. In like manner, when any point comes before us that is disagreeable to our humours and inclinations, and we are therefore very unwilling it should prove true; all means are used to represent it as an error. The evidence is tampered with, and various arts are used to weaken and diminish it as much as possible. We are so much prejudiced against it, and view it in such false lights, that we come at last to conclude and judge, just as we have a mind. Thus, for instance, when a man is deeply engaged in a vicious course of life, and strongly devoted to his lusts and passions; how difficult is it to open his eyes,

and bring him to a fair judgment of his own case? Represent to him the destructive nature of vice, both to soul and body; and shew him the ruin that hangs over his head. Make it appear in the plainest manner, that sin is the greatest folly, and guilt the mother of all misery; and that it cannot possibly be otherwise. What will be the effect of such a representation, and how will he receive it? If he does not shut his eyes, and stop his ears; yet he will see and hear in his own way. He will endeavour to believe and persuade himself, that it is little better than fallacy and fiction; that his course of life will yield him more pleasure than pain; and that the terrors of futurity are mere bugbears. This he hopes and wishes; and, through want of other evidence, he converts these hopes and wishes into proofs and probabilities. He will moreover palliate the deformity of sin and vice; give fair names to foul actions, and paint them in milder colours. Licentiousness he will call liberty; prodigality, generosity; and luxury, politeness. In a word, all kinds of immorality shall be softened into gallantry, greatness of spirit, or some such deceitful appella-

pellation. On the other hand, wisdom and virtue, however amiable in themselves, yet being disagreeable to him, shall be equally miscalled and misrepresented. Religion shall be looked upon as superstition, piety as hypocrisy, and strict morals as preciseness or pedantry. Thus the plain natures and essential differences of things are confounded, and almost lost, in a mist of prejudice, and men choose and “love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.” Again, men’s affections pervert their judgments, not only in respect of things, but persons and characters. When they dislike, and are prejudiced against each other; they can oftentimes neither see any good, nor spare the appearance of evil. The smallest blemishes are aggravated into odious deformities, while real excellencies are depreciated or overlooked. Every little slip passes for a high misdemeanour; and the most common failings are swelled into vices and immoralities. On the other hand, they plead no less partially of those whom they like and favour. Real faults are either not seen, or industriously covered, and even heinous crimes mitigated into errors and

infirmities. Virtues and good actions are magnified and doubled; and every tendency to merit is brightened into excellence and perfection. Thus affection supplants evidence, and serves instead of it; and love and hatred are made, in effect, the standards of truth.

Lastly; No prejudice is stronger, or more powerful, than what arises from interest. This principle coincides with the former, as it is an object of inclination: but forasmuch as that inclination is of a peculiar nature; it may seem to require distinct notice, and a separate consideration. Though indeed its influence on men's minds, and its power over their judgments, are so universally known and observed, that it will not be needful to enlarge much upon it. It is manifest from universal experience, how easily men's understandings are misled and deluded by it; and betrayed into errors and misrepresentations. Hence it is, that very many cases which come before them, are most deceitfully weighed. Place evidence in one scale, and interest in the other; and, without great probity, the latter is sure to prevail. What truth requires from us, what is just, and right,
and

and fit to be done, is for the most part very plain and clear; but alas! interest frequently blinds men's eyes, and tempts them to wrest and pervert judgment. It so darkens their perceptions, and spreads such a mist before their understandings, as intercepts the strongest lights; and makes them judge and act in opposition to reason, justice, and truth. Interest is almost the universal idol of mankind. All people fall down before it, and all nations do it service. It breaks through all obligations, confounds all duty, and God himself is rivalled by Mammon. The perfection of men's minds, and the purity of their hearts, are sacrificed to worldly profit; and instead of devoting themselves to righteousness and godliness, they are governed by gain. Whatever interferes with this, though it be of the utmost importance, is sure to have a troublesome aspect; and the most sacred things and persons an unwelcome appearance. The Gedarenes, we find, were so offended at an expensive miracle wrought by our Saviour; that instead of receiving the Divine Prophet, and thankfully acknowledging his mission, "they came
 "and besought him to depart out of
 H 5 their

“their coasts.” Conformably whereto, his pure precepts, and heavenly doctrines, have often been rejected on the same account; and the glorious light of the Gospel eclipsed by secular motives, and sordid considerations. In short, the most powerful cause of ignorance and prejudice, error and darkness, is that idolatrous love, that friendship of the world, which is at enmity with God.

S E R M O N IX.

THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF
INTELLECTUAL DARKNESS.

MATTHEW vi. 23.

*If therefore the light that is in thee be
darkness, how great is that darkness!*

IN a former discourse on these words,
having premised an explication of cer-
tain terms used in the context, the sense
of the text was laid down as follows.
If reason, or understanding, which is the
eye of the mind, and the light of the
H 6 soul,

soul, be vitiated by prejudice, and blinded by partiality; the consequence is darkness, profound darkness, instead of light; such as fills the mind with errors and absurdities, disorder and confusion.

Accordingly I proposed to shew, first, how, and by what means and causes, the mind of man is capable of being thus darkened and depraved; and, secondly, the degree and extent of this mischief, implied in the exclamation, "how great is that darkness!"

The former I considered in the last discourse, reducing the principal causes under these six heads; constitution, custom, authority, singularity, inclination, and interest; which I briefly went through, and took notice of their respective influences, and mischievous operations.

I shall therefore now proceed to the second particular, namely, the degree and extent of this mischief, implied in the exclamation, "how great is that darkness!" For though this was, in some measure, visible, under the foregoing head; yet it is of so great consequence, as to require and deserve a more distinct consideration. The degree of that darkness which is caused by such a depravation

tion of the mind and judgment, is partly discoverable from the nature of the thing, and partly from fact and experience. As to the nature of the thing, let it be considered, how the mind must needs be affected by such a complication and diversity of prejudices concurring to obstruct its light, in proportion to their prevalence and dominion. We are not to consider the darkness here spoken of as mere ignorance, or want of knowledge; which, in the first stage of life, is the unavoidable condition of humanity. As truth consists in the relations of ideas; it is necessary to acquire a stock of ideas, before we can discover the truths belonging to them. And till this be done, the mind must needs be unenlightened, and in the dark. But this darkness gradually disappears and vanishes by observation and instruction; and in process of time truth is taken in, and knowledge advanced, in proportion to men's opportunities and abilities. It must indeed be confessed and lamented, that a great part of mankind, even when arrived to years of maturity, have made but small progress in knowledge, and comparatively speaking, continued in a state of ignorance;

rance; either because they have wanted, or neglected, the means of instruction. On which account, "the light which is in them," if it be not "darkness," yet does not rise many degrees above it. However, this is not the "darkness" spoken of in the text; which is much greater, and more deplorable, because harder to be dispelled, and because it produces far worse effects. In the one case, a man has nothing to do but to learn; in the other case, before he be able to learn, to any purpose, he has a great deal to unlearn. Not only a stock of truth is to be laid in; but antecedently to that, many prejudices and errors are to be thrown out. To let in the light of truth, the avenues of his understanding must not only be opened, but cleaned and purged; and that rubbish removed which has been gathered by a careless or vicious education. There is manifestly no comparison between a mind that is barely ignorant and uninstructed, and a mind over-run with error and prejudice. In the former, knowledge is wanted; but there is a power, a disposition, and a readiness to receive it: in the latter, it is strongly obstructed; and there

there is not only unaptnefs, and difability, for the reception of truth; but oftentimes an averfion to it. “If the eye,” whether of body or mind, be clear and “fingle”; nothing more is needful, than that a man open it to the light, and be attentive to what he fees. But the cafe of a diftempered fight is widely different. When the eye is obftructed with thick films and cataracts; in order to let in light, it muft not only be opened, but couched. Now grofs prejudices are, as it were, the cataracts of the mind; which, more or lefs, difable it for perception, and judgment, and at length terminate in blindnefs. This, I fay, is the natural effect of them, unlefs they be removed and cured; which is a work of trouble and difficulty, and requires great care, conduct, and refolution. The operation is painful, and the event dubious. An unprejudiced mind is eafily brought to conviction. When the evidence of any truth is clear and ftrong, it ftrikes him at once, and gains his affent. But what avails the cleareft evidence to thofe who either cannot fee it, or will not take notice of it; as being guided and governed by quite different principles? The light
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and lustre of the object is lost upon them, through the disease and depravation of their faculties. Bring any point before them; and support it by the fairest arguments, and firmest proofs: these proofs shall be confronted and encountered by prejudices stronger and mightier than they. Great indeed is the force of truth; but seldom great enough to work its way through such obstructions. In short, the conquest of confirmed prejudices, and inveterate errors, is rarely accomplished; and when it is, may be compared to the removal of rocks and mountains.

It appears then, from the very nature of the thing, that this intellectual disorder is, and must be, very great; extensive in its influence, powerful in its causes, and pernicious in its effects. The mind is fixed in an unnatural situation, and its frame and faculties turned upside down. And indeed to determine and judge by any other rule than that of evidence, is as preposterous and absurd, and as contrary to the nature of things, as to attempt measuring sounds by the eye, or comparing colours by the ear. The sole object of the understanding is truth;

truth; and the perception of it entirely depends on our regard and attention to evidence. As far therefore as we forsake this, and give up ourselves to the guidance of prejudice; we so far cease to be rational beings, and intelligence is given us in vain. And forasmuch as every truth is connected with many more; we cannot be prejudiced against any, without exposing ourselves to manifold errors, and bringing upon us a train of absurdities. And if our prejudices are numerous, and widely spread; their effects rise in proportion, and unite in a general darkness. Thus a thick mist is formed, which covers our minds, and in a great measure deprives us of the use of the understanding.

But the degree of that darkness which is caused by this corruption of the mind and judgment, is further evident from fact and experience; as may abundantly be discovered both in ancient and modern times. Every age affords variety of instances; and all histories are full of them. If we look back to antiquity, and recollect the marks and monuments of the ignorance of the gentiles, and the darkness of paganism, we shall soon find to
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what a degree the understanding of mankind is capable of being corrupted and abused, and what deplorable effects that corruption produced. This is more especially remarkable in respect of the nature of the Deity, and the worship due to him. Though God never left himself without witness; though he had given men faculties abundantly capable of finding him out; though he had afforded them the strongest proofs, and clearest evidences, of his existence and attributes; his power, wisdom, goodness, and perfection; yet the strength of men's prejudices had so darkened their minds, depraved their judgments, and blinded their understandings; as to render them almost universally ignorant of the true God, and instead of him, to believe and worship they knew not what. How was the truth of God changed into a lye, and men's foolish hearts darkened, when they not only served the creature more than the creator, but ran after their own senseless inventions, and deified the works of their own hands! When the glory of the incorruptible God was transferred to the most unintelligent objects, and divine worship paid even to things that are not;

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to things that never had so much as a real existence; mere empty names, vain imaginations, and abstract ideas. Nor did the choice of their gods betray grosser ignorance and darkness, than their way and manner of serving them; which was directed and governed by the blindest superstition, and most barbarous enthusiasm; and consisted not only in things most irrational and absurd, but very often in dreadful rites, and diabolical oblations.

Nor were the Jews themselves clear of these vile practices, and pagan pollutions, notwithstanding their frequent revelations, and the conduct and instruction of Moses and the prophets. So far from it, that they were continually sinking into the most stupid idolatry; nor could even the terrors of mount Sinai keep them out of it. After the most signal manifestations of God's power and majesty, they soon hardened their hearts, and relapsed into the follies and abominations of the heathens round about them. And though by captivity and suffering, their eyes were at length opened; yet how remarkably and closely were they shut again at the appearance of
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their promised Messiah? What a train of miraculous evidence did they obstinately resist? What wonderful works and divine doctrines did they set at naught? How industriously did they oppose the strongest proofs, and steel their understandings against conviction? In short, the lowness of his condition, the meanness of his appearance, and the manner of his death, were such a stumbling-block to the Jews, that all arguments, and all miracles were ineffectual; and they had neither eyes to see, nor ears to hear. "The light that was in them became darkness;" and "how great was that darkness!"

But what is yet more to be lamented, even christianity itself has been turned into obscurity, and the marvellous light of the gospel frequently covered with the thickest clouds of error and superstition. Amidst the brightness of this glorious dispensation, very many christians have walked in darkness; have stumbled at noon-day, as in the night; and groped about for the truth like the blindest of the heathens. They have been led away by such gross delusions, and drawn into such crooked paths, as to lose sight, in
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a great measure, both of human reason, and divine revelation. For must not this be the case; must not men's judgments be extremely darkened and depraved, while they can embrace such corrupt doctrines, and monstrous absurdities, as are taught and established in the church of Rome? If either reason or scripture is to direct us, can any thing appear more stupid and senseless than to believe transubstantiation, and worship wafers? Certainly nothing, unless it be the setting up of infallibility in the midst of such abominations. To teach things impossible to be true, and at the same time maintain they cannot err; is such an indignity to human understanding, such a defiance of common sense, as can neither be paralleled, nor expressed. What greatly adds to the grievance, is the method of supporting and propagating this mystery of iniquity. On the foot of reason and evidence it cannot subsist one moment. It is therefore driven into men's minds by main force, and by dint of persecution. And so far have the prejudices of education and authority prevailed, that many even well-meaning men are brought to believe this method not
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only innocent, but laudable and meritorious. And thus the rules of justice, and the rights of conscience, are shamefully violated, to make way, not for truth, which neither needs nor allows any such means; but for errors and absurdities; a heap of falsehood, and a mass of corruption. Where evidence is not to be had, compulsion and violence supply its place. And indeed it must be confessed, though men cannot always see as they are directed, yet they can always feel. Though their understandings, in many cases, cannot be taken hold of, yet their senses may. And if the kingdom of darkness must be supported, this doubtless is the way. For where men dare not open their eyes, they will seldom fail to keep them shut.

But to proceed; The truth in the text may be found verified in fact, not only in respect of religious doctrines and worship; but also in practice and common life. Men betray the bias of their judgments, and the blindness of their understandings, in the resolutions they form, and the courses they follow. In numberless cases we find evidence stifled and suppressed by them; while they
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judge by quite different rules, and are governed merely by prejudice; as I observed in my former discourse. And most certain it is, that great darkness and disorder are hereby introduced into their counsels and conduct. Thus for instance the voluptuous person abandons himself, without rule or restraint, to sensual pleasures, and sinful enjoyments; and persuades himself that this is making the most of his condition, and employing his time and his faculties to the best advantage. But is this persuasion really the dictate of his understanding, and the result of his judgment? or is it not rather the voice of passion, and the determination of appetite? Which-ever it be, his mind must needs be greatly darkened and depraved. If this be really his judgment, it is as blind a one as can possibly be framed by a rational creature. It is, in effect, to conclude, that the state of brute animals is preferable to that of angels; and that the image of God planted in our minds is least worthy of our care and concern. It is, in effect, to conclude, that this life is more important than the next, and a few years of greater moment than eternity. And can
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any conclusions be more notoriously false and perverse than these? Can any thing argue greater darkness of mind, and depravity of judgment? If it be said, that, in such a case, men do not take counsel of their understandings; but follow rashly and blindly the impulse of their passions; this is confessedly acting in the dark, and wilfully rejecting the benefit of understanding. Either then reason is grievously perverted, or set aside; and whether it be the one or the other, the mischief must needs be great, and the consequence fatal.

Again; If we consider the pursuits of ambition, as they are usually carried on where the passion rises high, and reigns in full strength; we shall find the like erroneous conclusions, and the same darkness and confusion of judgment. If the ambitious man allow himself leisure to reflect and deliberate, which perhaps he seldom does in respect of the end, whatever he may do as to the means of attaining it; yet how grossly is reason betrayed and blinded by his inclination! In how deceitful a light does he view things, and how false are his estimates! For certainly there is no proportion between

tween the purchase he aims at, and the price it must cost him. I mention not the frequent disappointments that he is sure to meet with. Let him be supposed to prosper in his own way, without interruption, and all his wishes crowned with success; yet what are the highest honours of this world, when set in the balance against the glories of the next? The one mean, empty, precarious, and perishing; and the other solid, sublime, constant, everlasting. To resign therefore and give up the latter for the sake of the former, what is it but exchanging pearls for pebbles; or rather substances for shadows? For, upon a fair comparison, the prize of worldly ambition, however tempting in fact, is in reality no better. That toil and trouble, that hurry and bustle, that anxiety and restlessness of mind, to which it ever exposes men, are all in pursuit of so pitiful and wretched a bargain. In short, both the principal comforts of this life, and their grand interest in the next, are made a sacrifice to this glittering idol, which possesses and dazzles their imaginations, though it have scarce a being any where else.

And if the pursuits of ambition be thus unreasonable and injudicious; what less can we say of avarice? A vice peculiarly noted for blinding men's eyes, and confounding their understandings. The truth is, it springs from error, and darkness, and depravation of judgment; and if it do not find men infatuated, it is sure to make them so. What can be more repugnant to all the rules of reason and good sense, than the pursuits and measures of a miser, properly so called? who toils and labours to the last moment of his life in quest of a good that he dare not enjoy, and oftentimes cannot if he would: who converts the means into the end, and ever gets for getting sake: who the longer he lives, the keener he grows; and the faster he gathers, the wider he grasps: who the more he abounds, the more he dreads want; and yet the better content he is to starve: in short, who is most solicitous in making provision for life, when he is near his end, and has one foot in the grave. Such is the wisdom of avarice! as opposite to reason and sound judgment, and as impossible to be accounted for, as the dreams of a distempered imagination. But setting a-
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side these inconsistencies and riddles, still the miser's conduct is most egregiously foolish; forasmuch as he lays up his treasures in a wrong place, and prefers things temporal before the things that are eternal: forasmuch, as instead of improving in wisdom and virtue, and aiming to be rich in good works; he impoverishes his own soul, and lays waste the gifts and graces of heaven: in a word, forasmuch as he sinks into idolatry, and instead of serving God, worships Mammon. Most certain it is, that this can never happen, can never be any man's case, till the light of his mind be turned into darkness; and great must that darkness be. And indeed this holds true, more or less, of all sins; which are therefore properly styled works of darkness. They set out in ignorance and error, and their whole progress is fraud and delusion. Reason is undermined, judgment circumvented, and by degrees, the whole powers of the understanding vanquished. Thus the mind of man is corrupted, and the image of God mangled and defaced. Instead of truth and wisdom, falsehood and folly; instead of order, confusion; instead of happiness, misery.

Upon the whole; If we desire effectually to prevent these evils, it is absolutely necessary that we strike at the root of them. I mean, that we carefully guard against prejudices of all kinds, and take special care to preserve the light of our minds pure, clear, and uncorrupt: that the eye of the soul be kept single and sincere; fixed at all times upon evidence alone, and viewing every object in its own proper light, and genuine colours: that we accustom ourselves to observe and follow invariably the rule of truth; stedfastly purposing to resist every temptation, and withstand every propension, that may tend to draw us from it: that we neither submit to custom, nor authority, without examining, to the best of our power, the grounds on which they stand, and the reasons brought to support them: that we keep a strict watch on our own inclinations; lest they insinuate into our understandings, and give a wrong turn to our judgments: in fine, that no principle of vanity, no views of interest, be suffered to break in upon our integrity; but that we ever seek the truth, in the love thereof, with all simplicity and sincerity of mind. By a careful use of
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these means, we shall be, in a good measure, fortified both against erroneous judgment, and vicious practice; and the light which God has given us will not only be maintained, but continually improved. Thus our faculties will have full scope, and be exerted to the greatest advantage. And of how great consequence this is to us, we cannot be ignorant. All our hopes and all our welfare, depend on the use of those talents which God has given us. If we suffer them to be corrupted and spoiled; the damage must be great, and the loss irreparable. On the other hand, if we employ them wisely and well, our care will turn to the noblest account, and we shall reap the fruits of it for ever. It behoves us then to be watchful and circumspect in a matter of so great moment; and to render our endeavours the more effectual, to implore the assistance of heaven; that, by the illumination of his holy spirit, God will be pleased "to grant us a right judgment in all things; that so we walking in the light of his truth, may at length attain to the light of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

S E R M O N X.

THE DUTY OF RESIGNATION.

JOB ii. 10.

*Shall we receive good at the hand of God,
and shall we not receive evil?*

THESE are the words of Job, when reduced from the height of prosperity, to the lowest depth of misery. When calamities, a dire train, succeed one after another; his wife, harrassed by misfortunes, advises him to put an unnatural period to his life. But he, with that un-

conquered spirit, which neither his former prosperity had softened, nor his present misfortunes had broken, replied, "Thou talkest like one of the foolish," or irreligious "women": for shall we, beings of a mixed character, expect pure and unmixed happiness from our Creator? Shall we, who do so much evil, refuse to suffer any which he sends? "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

From this illustrious example of resignation, I shall take occasion to point out the means by which we may acquire the same serene and resigned temper, and be enabled, under all the troubles of life, to adopt the same language.

In the first place, We must not expect perfect happiness: it depends not upon ourselves alone, but upon a coincidence of several things, which seldom hit all right. Several ingredients are necessary to make up the costly composition; but one wrong ingredient is enough to poison the whole, and render it distasteful.

When we first make our entrance into the world, we are too apt to form sanguine notions, and to propose to ourselves high enjoyments in this world. But
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by that time we reach the noon of life, frequent disappointments, crosses, and pains call home our thoughts, lower our swelling ideas, and reduce them to a just sense of things; to what is really attainable in this state, which is at best, for any length of time, nothing but ease, tranquillity, and moderate satisfactions. "All the rivers run into the sea, says Solomon, yet is not the sea full:" so should all earthly pleasures, without those of a moral and spiritual nature, center in one soul, yet would not that soul be filled or satisfied; because, the soul being a spiritual being, none but spiritual pleasures can be suited to its nature, and proportioned to its greatness; because, in the next place, virtue is the health of the soul, which is as necessary to give a relish to any pleasure within, as the health of the body is to make us relish our meat and drink.

Secondly, If you would not be overmuch troubled at the loss of any thing, take care to keep your affections disengaged. As soon as ever you have placed your affections too intensely beyond a certain point on any thing below, from that moment you may date your misery. Whether riches,

pleasure, or honour, be the chief point in view, take it for granted, there is not that earthly thing, but what is sufficient to make you very unhappy, when once you become too strongly attached to it. Whenever you are deprived of it, you will be indifferent to all the blessings of life, which you are possessed of: there will be a craving void left aking in the breast, which it will be no easy matter to supply and fill up. A sure indication this, that God has designed himself, in whom there is "a fulness of joy," to be the principal object of our desires. And some have been of opinion, that the soul feels stronger pangs in being torn from those things, for which she has contracted a long habitual fondness, than she does in being divorced from that body to which she has been long united. Guard then betimes against any growing passion, whether for riches, pleasures, or honours; and you will find the loss of them will sit less heavy upon you. We rest with the main bent of our souls upon earthly things, as our principal supports; the consequence of which is, that, when they slip from under us, our fall is more hurtful, in proportion to the weight

weight and stress, with which we relied upon them.

Thirdly, Reflect on the advantages you have, rather than be always dwelling on those you have not. Turn your thoughts to the bright side of things. The pleasures of conversation, the endearments of friendship, the solid satisfactions of virtue and benevolence, are more or less in every man's power. Lead a life which knows no vacancy from generous sentiments, and then the spirit of a man will sustain his infirmities.

We are affected with delightful sensations, when we see even the inanimate parts of the creation, the meadows, flowers, and trees, in a flourishing state. There must be some rooted melancholy at the heart, when all nature appears smiling about us, to hinder us from corresponding with the rest of the creation, and joining in the universal chorus of joy. But if meadows and trees in their cheerful verdure, if flowers in their bloom, and all the vegetable parts of the creation in their most advantageous dress, can inspire gladness into the heart, and drive away all sadness but despair; to see the rational creation happy and

flourishing, ought to give us a pleasure as much superior, as the latter is to the former in the scale of beings. But the pleasure is still heightened, if we ourselves have been instrumental in contributing to the happiness of our fellow-creatures, if we have helped to raise a heart drooping beneath the weight of grief, and revived that "barren and dry land, where no water was," with refreshing showers of love and kindness. Reflections upon our benevolence to our species, next to those upon our piety to God, will be to us, what they were to Job, who dwelled much upon them, our best comfort under the pressure of adversity.

Consider, that the blessings you enjoy are the free gifts of God; but the calamities you suffer are the just wages of sin. And yet perhaps you are insensible of, and ungrateful for the former, tho' unmerited favours; while you murmur and repine at the latter, which you have fully deserved.

Fourthly, Let us reflect, how reasonable it is, that our wills should be conformable and resigned to the divine. Could we compass some favourite scheme
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in view, the centre of our wishes, and the end of our endeavours ; final misery might, for any thing we know, to a mind like ours, be the consequence of it. Should those calamities come upon us, which we dread and fence against ; they may be the effectual means of our salvation. For calamities, God's extraordinary means of reforming sinners, may penetrate that heart, which the common occurrences of life could not reach or affect. Because, though God's hand may be legible in them, yet it is only so to an attentive observer : but violent afflictions will rouse the soul, just as a hurricane does the body, from the most profound repose.

No one ought to pray for wealth or honour, in an unreserved manner, or without such restrictions as these. O thou eternal Being, the sole author of every thing that is good in itself ; and the sole unerring discernor of what is good for us ; if thou seest that I shall be more beneficial to the world, and more happy in myself, by an accession of fortune ; then may thy goodness confer it upon me : but if thou foreknowest, that, instead of doing more good thereby, it will dazzle
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my mind, and make me forget my friends, forget thee, the best of friends, forgetting most of all myself, the better part of myself ; then, rather strip me of every thing, but my virtue, than grant me all the enjoyments in this world, without that well grounded peace of conscience, which this world cannot give, and the loss of which nothing, which it can give, can countervail.

Perhaps you are uneasy, that you are despised, and your proud heart rebels within you. Alas ! Men do not, properly speaking, so much despise you, as they do your fortune : and can you wonder they should despise that, which is despicable and little in itself ? nothing can be less, except it be their minds, who disregard you upon that account ; or your own, who are troubled above measure at it. If you had an ample fortune, they would idolize you ; though, like an idol indeed, you had eyes and saw not any thing in a true light ; ears and heard not the voice of reason ; so very contemptible, that nothing can be more so, except it be those who put their trust in you.

Are you sorry to see worth and virtue neglected, while vice thrives and is advanced ? Why thus it generally has been,
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and thus it always will be, without a miracle. For worth and virtue is backward in making advances, content with a consciousness of deserving those honours, which it seldom gains. Whereas the worthless leave no stone unturned to compass that by dint of assurance and unwearied application, which they despair of upon any other foot. Add to this, that the worthy will rise, if at all, by worthy means. They will scorn, after a great example, to do that for preferment, which even the worthless would not do, but for preferment. And when they find all the direct avenues to greatness blocked up, when they cannot enter in by the proper door, which is that of virtue; they will then poorly and abjectly climb or creep up some other way, "like a thief and a robber," by any indirect or sinister artifices. Whereas the bad are not scrupulous, they can care less little engines of power, prostitute their conscience, and make a sorry purchase at the expence of honour and religion.

But which is the most happy? the former or the latter? He is far happier, who even amidst the universal wreck of his fortunes has preserved one invaluable

luable pearl, his virtue, worth infinitely more than all he has lost; than that man is, who, whatever else he remains possessed of, has made shipwreck of a good conscience. The man, that has lost his own soul, is miserable indeed; but he, who amidst all his losses has not lost himself, that better part, which is chiefly himself; has within him that conscious worth, and that bright prospect before him, which will abate the edge of his misfortunes. Not all the united evils, which human malice can invent, or power execute, are comparable to one single evil, that of guilt; when one has incurred the wrath of that Almighty Being, in whose pleasure is life, and whose displeasure is worse than death. He who is happy in nothing but his innocence, may enjoy himself much more, than the most prosperous villain, who, if he thinks at all, must have several hours of exquisite anguish, when by himself; which his pride conceals from company, and the view of the world. The person whose sins are "like a fore burthen, too heavy for him to bear," feels a greater load, than any he can lay upon another. There is a pleasure even in the silent melancholy

lancholy of a quiet conscience, far superior to all those noisy, and therefore empty joys, which are designed to divert the thoughts of a guilty one. When all the world frowns upon him, and every thing looks black about him; that being, whose "the whole world is, and all that is therein," can "lift up the light of his countenance" upon him, so that there shall be nothing dark within him.

Are you deprived of your friends? Convinced by sad experience, upon how precarious a tenure we hold that most valuable blessing, friendship, we should learn, from hence, to cultivate one friendship more, a friendship unprecarious and unperishable, a friendship with that being, who is the almighty helper of the friendless, who will never leave us, nor forsake us. Instead of sorrowing, as men without hope, for our departed friends, let us consider, that the greatest instance of our kindness to the memory of the dead, is to think, live and act, as we may reasonably presume, they would desire of us, and expect from us, if alive; and their desire would be, that we should not disquiet ourselves above measure.

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Those, whose lives have been drawn out to any length, must have survived several of their friends; and, though new ones may succeed, and be adopted into their room, yet after having tasted the pleasures of old friendships, they seldom greatly relish the new; because they say, and think, the old were better. The reason of which probably is, that men insensibly join the pleasureable ideas of their younger years, with the idea of those persons, with whom they then conversed. The remembrance of that season of delight, associates itself with, and gives an agreeable lustre to, what was said and done then, and to those who said and did it. After the loss of an old acquaintance, to whom we used to pour forth all our soul, (and no wonder, for he was as our own soul) nothing can so effectually bear up the mind, as a consciousness, that we have acquainted ourselves with God, who was our guide from our youth, will not forsake us, when our strength faileth, and will be our portion for ever.

Are you, though innocent, deprived of your reputation? When persons through ignorance mistake, or through villainy

villainy misrepresent your actions; can you wish for a nobler theatre to display your virtues, than the heaven of heavens; for an auguster assembly to applaud them, than the united host of men and angels; or for a greater judge to reward them, than He, who is at once the unerring Judge of perfection in others, and the consummate standard of perfection in himself? In the mean time you will best answer all objections against your goodness, by doing good; as the philosopher answered the cavils against motion, by moving, and walking about: and, when by this means you have established your character; you may despise each idle blast of censure, as a wind that soon passeth away, and cometh not again.

Does the fear of ills appall you, which must certainly come upon you some time or other; as sickness, for instance, or the apprehensions of imminent death? Nature, or rather the wise Author of nature, supplies us, during our illness, with several resources of comfort, which we were not before aware of. When we are in full health, we cannot imagine, how we should brook pain, sickness and
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confinement: no sooner are we ill, than we find a new set of desires, a new train of ideas, a new frame of mind, suited to the present occasion. We no longer eagerly covet that liberty, those diversions and enjoyments, which were before our favourite desires. In short, most ills, in this particular, resemble a fog: while we are at a distance, they seem so solid, as to shut out each glimpse of light; but no sooner do we approach them, than we find they are much thinner than they appeared.

Are you obliged to sit down under some grievous disappointments? Perhaps you might have been as much disappointed, if you had succeeded; by finding, that things upon enjoyment seldom answer the gay flattering ideas, which we form before-hand; and that your reason had been the dupe of your imagination, which had painted objects bigger than the life. Many, who have concluded, they should be thoroughly miserable, if they miscarried in their pursuits; yet, some time after their miscarriage, have been quite easy and contented. An absolute despair of gaining a point, will as effectually put a stop to the craving of
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our desires, as the very possession of the thing desired: the soul will be no longer restless, but take things as it finds them, and enjoy what it has. From hence we may learn, that, though every man must know what he desires; few or none know, what they do not want; not want, I mean, in regard to the real necessities, or valuable conveniences of life; though they might wish for them to furnish a supply for their vanity, or for the gratification of some exorbitant passion. It must be owned, for the honour of nature, or rather of the author of nature, that half the miseries in the world are owing to follies, of which nature is entirely innocent. Besides those inclinations, which are originally interwoven in our frame: education, custom, and the fashion of the world, have begot in us several artificial desires. Now, if providence has made the gratification of our natural appetites easy under proper regulations; it is no reflection upon his goodness, that he has not put it in every man's power to satisfy those acquired cravings, and fantastic desires, which we have created in ourselves. We seldom fail to revenge upon ourselves the wrong we
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have done nature, by severely suffering for departing from its simplicity, to introduce a taste for expensive follies. We are first uneasy, because we imagine we want such things, and, when we are in possession of them, we are uneasy, because we find such things are defective in themselves.

Are you aggrieved by oppressive power? What then, shall virtue be injured here; and shall its grievances not be redressed? Surely, "then have
" I cleansed my heart in vain, and wash-
" ed my hands in innocency." But hold, impatient man—Wait thou with humble resignation of mind; till, at the last grand revolution, all distinctions, but the only valuable ones, those of a religious and moral nature, shall be no more; till that glow-worm lustre, with which some, at once both bright and despicable, have been invested, shall disappear at the dawn of everlasting day!

Wouldest thou be grieved at a minute's uneasiness, which should be productive of happiness for the whole term of thy following life? No surely. Why this life bears no more proportion to eternity, than a minute does to thy life below.

low. It is but a point, in comparison of thy whole existence. Submit then to afflictions, which God severely kind lays upon thee: afflictions, which are but for a moment; yet, if patiently endured, will work out for you an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Carry thy eyes upwards to that blessed place, where thy nature shall be, as it were, cast anew; purified from all drossy mixtures, and coarse alloys of human frailty; but brightened and refined, as to the sterling lustre and genuine excellencies of the soul. Here is one continued repetition of the same unsatisfactory objects, and "there is nothing new under the sun:" but there, far perhaps above the sun, new scenes, new beings, new wonders, new joys will present themselves to our enlarged views.

Look then upon this world, as one wide ocean, where many are shipwrecked and irrecoverably lost, more are tossed and fluctuating; but none can secure to themselves, for any considerable time, a future undisturbed calm. The ship, however, is still under sail; and whether the weather be fair or foul, we are every minute making nearer approaches to,
and

and must shortly reach the shore: and may it be the haven, where we would be!

Then shall we understand, that, what we mistook for and called misfortunes, were, in the true estimate of things, advantages, invaluable advantages. Then shall we know, why riches were withholden from us, and poverty our lot; namely, that riches might have begotten in us an indifference to religion, sloth, luxury, insolence to distressed merit, and a contempt of our fellow-creatures: whereas poverty was the parent of an affection for the things above, and of all the lovely train of sister virtues; temperance, patience, humility, meekness, and industry in our respective callings.

Then will it signify little or nothing, whether we have gone down to the chambers of death by an easy gradual descent; or have been violently pushed off the precipice of life: whether we have been tossed by storms and tempests; or had a smooth and easy voyage, to the shore of everlasting rest. Unless it be to repent of the sins of our past lives; it is scarce worth our while to look backward: let us then look forward to that life which
is

is to come. Let us consider all the splendid amusements of this world, as so many gay follies; and all the more important transactions of it, as so many sober follies, if they interfere with our preparations for the next. Let us repose an unreserved trust in that Being, whose almighty power will protect us, whose unerring wisdom will direct our goings, and whose infinite goodness will overpay our slight sufferings with an unfading crown of glory.

THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF

CHARLES THE FIRST

BY

JOHN BURNET

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

IN TWO VOLUMES

THE SECOND VOLUME

CONTAINING

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S E R M O N XI.

AGAINST PROPHANENESS.

EXODUS XX. 7.

*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord
thy God in vain: for the Lord will not
hold him guiltless, that taketh his name
in vain.*

THIS precept, in the opinion of many great expositors, might have been better translated thus: "Thou shalt not take up the name of the Lord thy God falsely," or make use of it by way
K 2 of

of appeal to him as omniscient, and to whom belongs the final decision in all cases of equity, in attestation and support of a falshood. The Psalmist therefore joins these two phrases together, in his description of a religious and upright man; that he hath not lift up his soul to vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. And indeed, for the same general reason, that false Gods are stiled vanities, or vain Gods; vain oaths may signify the same as false oaths. This is most evidently the language of scripture, and agreeable to every sentiment of right reason. And it is very probable, that our blessed Saviour, who had before referred distinctly to other precepts of the decalogue, had an immediate regard to this particular precept in these words: "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths."

The first and principal thing therefore, that, we may reasonably suppose, is forbidden by the third commandment, is perjury; a crime so repugnant to all the ideas that mankind have ever formed of God, and so utterly subversive of public order, that it has been held in the utmost abhor-

abhorrence, and branded with signal infamy, in every age and nation. The true nature of an oath is this : an appeal to God as the supreme judge of equity, in all controversies about right and wrong, as the friend and patron of the injured, and as the severe punisher of the injurious : it is an appeal to his infinite knowledge as a witness to our integrity, and an imprecation of his just and heavy vengeance upon ourselves, if we are knowingly and deliberately insincere. The man, therefore, who swears positively to a falsehood, or takes an oath which he is determined to violate, or who, upon any temptation, recedes from what he has solemnly and warrantably sworn, must not only be entirely destitute of the least spark, and most languid impression, of religion ; but, if he is not a speculative atheist, must act in direct contempt and defiance of God. He must be a downright monster in nature, deriding the justice of the deity, and challenging omnipotence to do its worst. And moreover the crime of perjury may not only be attended, in particular cases, with extremely injurious consequences ; but as oaths have, in almost all communities, the last determi-

nation in points of social justice, whether respecting life or property, and are the principal fences of government itself, besides introducing present and temporary inconveniences, it manifestly tends to the overthrow of all right, and to the confusion and total dissolution of all civil societies. So that there is no possible villainy, but what we may fairly suppose the perjured to be capable of committing without remorse : because they neither fear God, nor regard man, and are absolutely divested of all sentiments that are either generous, virtuous, or humane.

Very near a-kin to this most abominable crime, is, the binding ourselves by an oath to perform things that are in their own nature immoral ; or to adhere strictly and inviolably to any engagements and confederacies, which, in themselves, are unlawful and criminal.

Farther ; Every rash and indeliberate oath, and especially the habit of wanton swearing in common conversation, falls very naturally within the scope of the prohibition contained in the text ; and deserves, a particular attention. If we are firmly convinced of the existence of an eternal first cause, who made and supports

ports the vast fabric of the universe; if we are convinced that his greatness transcends all our ideas, that his dominion is immense, his power absolute and uncontrollable, his wisdom boundless and unsearchable, that all nature is subject to his controul, and subsists only by his invigorating influence, and that our own happiness and misery, nay, our very being, are entirely at his disposal: if I say, we acknowledge these plain dictates of reason, we ought always to entertain the most grand and elevated thoughts of God's supreme glory and majesty. This is but a decent respect to so perfect and exalted a character; it is no more than treating it with common propriety: which, if there be any regard at all due to characters, in proportion to their dignity and merit (a truth that is as plain as the distinction of colours and sounds) must be a necessary and indispensable obligation. Now from hence it follows, that whatever directly tends to lessen that profound and humble reverence, which all creatures owe to the universal Creator, must be highly criminal; since a more heinous or unnatural an offence cannot be imagined, than to offer indignity to that

most amiable and glorious being, who has a rational and just claim to our utmost affection and esteem.

And that this is the natural tendency of the vice, which I am now arguing against, will be evident on a very little reflection. For it is an obvious and certain truth, that things of the greatest importance and use, by being common and familiar grow to be less regarded: things of the highest estimation, by being mixed with low images, are debased and rendered despicable. If therefore we take the liberty to mention the sacred and venerable name of God on every frivolous and slight occasion, it is no wonder if it becomes a name of very little solemnity and weight with us; or if this rashness and levity of temper settle, at length, into an habitual disregard. On the contrary, it would be against the course of nature, in all other cases, should it happen otherwise. A due reverence and veneration of God can only be maintained, by cultivating in our minds a constant sense of the infinite distance between him and us, a sense of his incomprehensible majesty and spotless perfection, and of our own comparative meanness

meanness and insignificance: but it must in the end be quite destroyed, if we accustom ourselves to imprecate his displeasure, and appeal to him without having any meaning, in our loosest and vainest conversations; and, in short, take such freedoms with the almighty sovereign of the world, as are not justifiable towards one of our own species, unless he be unquestionably our inferior.

But this is not all: for this corrupt and impious practice has not only a tendency to weaken the regards due to our Maker, but is, itself, an instance of the grossest irreverence and contempt of him. For what can be a more manifest token of disrespect, than to use that tremendous name, which all the hosts of heaven, beings of the highest order of intelligence, adore and venerate, to embellish idle discourse, and give an air and colour to our impertinence? What a daring affront is it to the immaculate purity of God, to invoke him in the very scenes of our lewdness and debauchery! Or how, almost, is it possible for us to express a more diminutive opinion of his wisdom, justice, and veracity, than by appealing to him as a witness to the truth of known

and deliberate falshood? If this be not done in a court of judicature, it still retains the nature of perjury, though the effects, as to the public, may not be the same. If it be done for our amusement and diversion only, without any intention to hurt our neighbour, even then the very best that can be said for us is, that we make a jest of God, and that we treat the displeasure of him, who can make both heaven and earth to tremble, as a thing that may be sported with. But surely this ought not to be allowed, if there be any moral order, any fitness or propriety of conduct, any connection between just action, and the nature of things; for it is directly contrary to all these: it must, therefore, if there be any universal rule, any standard at all, by which to judge of good and evil, be in itself absolutely, and always, immoral: and an act of plain and flagrant immorality. And one might reasonably expect that it would shock the temper of a man (retaining only general notions of decency, and but slightly influenced by motives of religion) to think, that he has abused the greatest name in the universe,
and

and the name of one to whom he is under infinite obligations, with such insufferable wantonness and insolence.

But besides the impiety of swearing by the name of God in our common discourse, and on the most trivial occasions, it is likewise, in its consequences, very detrimental to society. This follows in part from what has been already said: for a strict regard to the authority of God, and an awe of his supreme grandeur and dominion, enforces the observation of human laws. Whatever, therefore, lessens this regard, must proportionably weaken the strength, and reduce the flourishing state of societies, by taking away one great security of the civil rights of mankind.

But the point which I shall principally illustrate, in order to prove this beyond all contradiction, is, that the vice, which I am now exposing, has a visible tendency to impair, and by a gradual process quite extinguish, our sense of the sacredness and inviolable obligation of an oath; with which the support of government, the quiet enjoyment of property, and the most valuable branches of social happiness, are inseparably connected.

It is impossible, that while we allow ourselves to trifle with oaths in the general course of our behaviour, we should respect them, considered in their own nature, as matters of any great importance; or that if we looked upon them as holy ties, and inviolable, we should make it our practice to swear to what we never intended to perform, or to the truth of what we knew to be false. The necessary tendency of such a rash proceeding is to render oaths cheap and contemptible, by diminishing the awe of God as our impartial judge, and the severe avenger of deceit and prevarication. And if we consider the matter thoroughly and seriously, I am persuaded we shall be able to assign no good reason, why a person, who has habituated himself to *vain* swearing, should not, on a strong motive of private interest, proceed to deliberate *false* swearing; or why he, who makes no scruple to call God to witness (when he is only in jest) in common conversation, should not think it as lawful, when some very considerable temptation presents itself, to do the same in a court of judicature? The fear of civil punishment, or a tenderness

derness for his neighbours rights, may perhaps have some weight with him; but the religious authority of an oath, which he has been accustomed to treat as a trifling ludicrous thing, cannot be supposed, in such cases as these, to have any powerful influence: so that men being entirely left to their natural notions of justice, and the restraint of human laws, which, if there be no fear of a Supreme Governor and Judge, will be too easily overborn by a prospect of unlawful gain; they must, of consequence, be more prepared for acts of perjury: which could not have abounded so much amongst us, if the solemnity of an oath had been carefully maintained, and not prostituted and debased by vulgar use. And nothing more can be necessary to prove the heinousness of this vice, than the having clearly shewn that it leads to the commission of another crime, which renders the security of government, the allegiance due to princes, and the possessions, characters, and lives of their subjects, quite uncertain and precarious.

And now, upon weighing the matter calmly, every one would imagine, that, to induce men to commit a crime of so
foul

foul an aspect to all who are not seasoned and hardened to the practice of it, there must be some very considerable temptation: and nothing can be more surprising than to find, that there is neither a peculiar foundation for it in nature, or the desire of sensitive gratification, or in irregular private interest; but that it is mere unaccountable extravagance, supported by custom against religion, sense, and decency. The proud or passionate may plead a propensity, or particular bias in their complexion, to the vices which they respectively indulge; but this vice springs from no constitutional instinct; it is entirely of foreign extract, the product of vanity and impertinence. If natural heat and impetuosity of temper be assigned as the source of it: I answer, that there are many other ways of venting excessive passion equally terrible, and withal more adapted to the nature of it; so that it is only the force of habit that has directed it into this channel, which men would never have thought of, if they had not before discarded all reverence of God, and concern about religion. Besides, there can be no peculiar satisfaction, but to a profane vitiated

vitiating fancy, in the words that compose an oath, nor in those of a vile execration. And as for the advantages, directly resulting from this vice, what are they? Why, it renders a man's character suspected, and frequently lessens the confidence that would otherwise be reposed in him; scarce any are so thoroughly degenerate, as really to esteem him for it, but many despise him. So that it is very astonishing that this strange custom, the folly of which is equal to its wickedness, should even make its way in the world, and much more that it should become a fashion, and an infection which has spread itself amongst all degrees and orders of men; since it is neither reason nor ornament in discourse, neither an argument of wit nor gallantry, and has neither pleasure nor profit attending it, nor any original passion in human nature directly exciting and prompting to it; but, on the contrary, is a reproach to us as men, as good members of society, as pretenders to virtue, unbecoming every worthy and honourable character we can form an idea of, and, in short, is one of the most senseless, unnatural, and useless vices that was ever invented. Most strange indeed it is, that a man
should

should be so industriously wicked ; and run all the hazard of it to his immortal soul hereafter, only to make his conversation ridiculous.

Again, common swearing, and vain prophane cursing, are mean low vices, that justly expose the offender to contempt. They require no talents in order to make a proficiency in them, but may be practised in their utmost extent of impiety and guilt, where there are the most despicable natural abilities, and no improvements of art. They are vices in which the meanest of the people rival the greatest ; so that there is no distinction in them, they do not shew a man's rank, not set him at all in a conspicuous and singular point of view. And finally, they are rude unmannerly vices. For all the rules of civility and genteel behaviour are strongly against a practice, which is esteemed infamous by some in almost all companies that we frequent. Men of true piety universally protest against it ; and what reason is there, that they should be liable to receive perpetual insults from rakes and libertines ? It is undeniably a clownish behaviour, let the external rank and empty title of the blasphemer

phemer be what it will, it is still the behaviour of a clown, compleatly ill-bred, to treat with a contemptuous familiarity the greatest and best of Beings, in the presence of any who have a high veneration of him. Every one would naturally resent what he thought to be an indignity offered to his father or friend; and it must give, at least, equal uneasiness to a virtuous mind, to hear the father of the rational universe, and his constant benefactor, treated disrespectfully: upon which account such a conduct must be absolutely savage, and inconsistent with all just notions of politeness. All which considerations, I would hope, may incline persons of any refinement, and of generous tempers, to reform their conversation in this particular; even though they have not (which were infinitely more to be desired) so much religion, as to be restrained by a reverence of God, and a dread of his displeasure.

Let it not be urged in excuse for this vice, that it discovers courage and height of spirit; because that is best discovered by brave and generous actions: and it certainly argues want of resolution, a timid, slavish, impotent mind, to be
pre-

prevailed upon to condescend to sinful compliances, either to please particular companies, give ourselves fashionable airs, or serve any purposes of vanity, popularity, or secular interest. No man demonstrates such true courage, as he that despises all usages, however authoritative, and universally prevailing, which oppose religion and common sense. Such a one has not only singular merit in himself, but will probably be respected and honoured even by those, who are too base and poor spirited to imitate his noble example: and to urge custom, against points of morality, is to set up the follies and extravagancies of men, against the infinite wisdom of God, and the immutable laws of nature. Should the licentious and profane person plead, farther, sudden and violent passion transporting him beyond the due command of himself; or else strength of habit; neither will be a particular excuse for these, more than for any other immoralities. Let us apply these excuses to other crimes that have a more startling sound, and are branded with more universal infamy: let the adulterer, for instance, and the murderer plead, the one the irresistible force

force of hasty rage and passion, the other the overbearing influence of imperious habits, it will be immediately replied to each: it was thy duty to have cured these excesses of passion, to have reformed these irregular and mischievous habits; and to urge habit in mitigation of a bad action is making use of that very circumstance, which is an aggravation of thy guilt, as an argument to extenuate and soften it. Again, if such impious offenders urge in their excuse, that they intend nothing by their impieties; is it not a shame that the awful name of God, that comprehends in it the highest and most important sense, should be used without a meaning? Besides, we are now talking of the nature of things, of the moral good or evil of actions; which are determined by fixed invariable rules. And if there be, in nature, a necessary difference between virtue and vice, an action may be never the less wicked and disgraceful, because men have no design in it. A persecutor, and other criminals of an enormous size, may go beyond meaning nothing; they may intend well the promotion of God's honour, and the establishment of what they think to be truth;
and

and yet their conduct may not only be repugnant to principles of religion, but abhorrent to common humanity.

Nor let it be pleaded in behalf of profane swearing, that it is sometimes necessary to manage tempers, that by mild and gentle speeches are ungovernable: I answer, that this never does, nor can happen, but when we are so addicted to blasphemy, that without a volley of oaths and vile imprecations we are not believed to be in earnest. Let it be once known (and surely it may be discovered by many other methods perfectly innocent) that we have resolution enough to support our authority, and the regard due to our respective characters; and this vice will be as unnecessary and useless, as it is dishonourable to God, and offensive to a sober mind. Nay, it is not unlikely that we shall be more observed and attended to; and that not from terror, but from a real respect: which, as bad as the world is, it is generally inclined to pay to temperate passions, sobriety, and an unaffected virtue. Besides, for want of such boisterous, domineering, savage discourse, we shall never miss of a proper regard, but on, comparatively, trifling

ling occasions; not in the great and important offices of life: and surely, it cannot be worth the while, in order to be served more expeditiously in our pleasures and gay luxurious entertainments, which, to censure with unexceptionable modesty, are of very small moment, and redound but little either to our honour or advantage: it cannot, I say, be worth the while, for so low an end, to indulge a practice that bids defiance to the almighty, leads to pernicious consequences with respect to society, and is, on all accounts, absolutely indefensible.

By the whole of what has been offered, I hope it has been unanswerably demonstrated, that the particular character which I have endeavoured to expose, only by representing it in its true colours, cannot be reconciled to that of a reasonable or honourable, because not of a good moral man. I need not attempt to prove, since the well known words of our blessed Saviour are, as to this point, most express and decisive, that it is utterly inconsistent with the character of a christian; as inconsistent as christian and intemperate, christian and revengeful, though there may be a difference in the nature of the crimes. So
that

that if we would make our profession of christianity correspondent with itself, if we reverence the voice of reason and of the moral law, if we desire to be universally agreeable, and study affability and complaisance to mankind, we shall not allow ourselves, in our common conversation, to "take the name of the Lord our God in vain;" against which practice all manly, honourable, virtuous and christian principles do loudly, and with united force, remonstrate.

I shall only add, by way of conclusion, what this commandment supposes as the basis and foundation of it, namely that we should endeavour to improve, and raise to the highest pitch of reverence and honour, our ideas of all the attributes, and especially of the moral excellencies, and government of God: which will not only be an effectual check to the impieties therein prohibited, but a constant preparative for all the duties and offices of religion.

S E R M O N XII.

ON THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN THE
GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD.

ECCLES. IX. 2.

*There is one Event to the Righteous and to
the Wicked.*

FROM the fact asserted in these words arises an objection against providence, attended with some difficulty, and worthy of a serious consideration. If God govern the world, how come things to pass, so unlikely to be suffered by infallible wisdom and justice?

What

What rule is it by which he distributes good and evil things?

How must we defend his goodness, when the righteous are in adversity, and the wicked prosper?

Why do not things befall men according to their works; but oftentimes "there be just men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous?" How come "all things alike unto all, one event to the righteous and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not? As is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath."

It is no wonder that these should have been hard questions to them who knew nothing certainly of rewards and punishments after death.

But it would seem strange, that they who were better instructed by revelation, should be at a stand sometimes, and doubtful what to resolve; if every day's experience did not teach us how apt even wise men are to hearken to the suggestions of passion against reason, and to break out
into

S E R M O N XII.

THE FOLLY AND GUILT OF
INTEMPERANCE.

LUKE xxi. 34.

*And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time
your hearts be overcharged with surfeit-
ing and drunkenness.*

SO many and great, and at the same
time so very evident are the evils arising
from luxury and intemperance, that to
be guilty of them is a certain sign of de-
plorable folly.

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These are, in the first place, expensive vices, able to devour the largest estates. They are seldom content with the dull repetition of former excesses, but delight to be inventing new and more costly methods of indulgence. Luxury therefore is never at a stand; it breaks through all restraints, and, having once leaped the bounds of nature and reason, disdains to be confined within the compass of men's circumstances, however extensive. It also creates a contempt of good œconomy, and makes men careless and imprudent in the conduct of their affairs. It therefore leads to poverty, and has often ruined the most considerable fortunes.

And poverty is then by far the most intolerable, when it has been occasioned by debauchery and excess. The man, that has always used himself to a temperate life, may be contented and chearful in narrow circumstances: he has moderate appetites and few wants, which are easily supplied at a small expence. But they, who are accustomed to high living, have created to themselves a multitude of wants, and cannot descend, without
extreme

extreme reluctance, to that cheap and frugal diet, which poverty prescribes. Their palates, being made tender with delicacies, cannot bear the touch of ordinary fare. Hence, when the diminution of their fortunes compels them to retrench the luxury of their tables, they repine at their condition, are mortified with the remembrance of past pleasures, and long in vain to repeat them.

Or they have recourse to base methods, in order to retrieve their fortune, and continue their debauched pleasures. Their unnatural appetites, whose commands they dare not dispute, order them to furnish exorbitant supplies; which if they cannot obtain by lawful methods, they are prepared for the most dishonourable practices. Their occasions are pressing, and, at any rate, ways and means must be invented to procure what may administer to their insatiable lusts. *Before* they sacrificed fortune to pleasure, and *now* they prostitute honour to fortune. If in a high station, they become pliant tools to any party, which makes them the largest offers; abandon integrity; eagerly court the wages of corruption; and would esteem themselves happy,

if they could sell their country and conscience together for a bribe or a pension. If of lower rank, they either sink into a slavish dependance on their superiors, courting their favour, and haunting their tables; or engage in the commission of some desperate villainy, to support their extravagance.

It is plain, then, that a course of intemperance is ruinous to a man's fortune.

Nor will it bear dispute, which has the advantage in point of ease and tranquillity, the temperate man or the intemperate. The gratifications of the latter are preceded by violent and feverish desires; the former can chearfully dispense with necessary forbearance. Moderate meals and simple food digest without difficulty, and are succeeded by pleasant thoughts and lively conceptions. But gross surfeiting oppresseth the body, and along with it weighs down the soul.

Let us suppose, what many seem to believe, that pleasure is the supreme good of human life; that other enjoyments are only valuable, as they are subservient to it; and that any, or all of them ought to be abandoned, whenever they come in competition with it. I say, if we allow
this

this at present, it will be no hard matter to shew, that by intemperance we widely miss our aim, and lose the best part of this very pleasure, which stands so high in our estimation. For what is a debauch, but a wild tumult of sensations and passions, which at the time is attended with little enjoyment, issues in pain, and prevents us from relishing future indulgences?

I believe no man ever said more in praise of pleasure than Epicurus: and yet perhaps no man ever enjoined more earnestly, or observed more constantly the severest laws of sobriety. He asserts indeed, that sensual pleasure is our supreme good. In this doubtless he is mistaken; for certainly we are formed for something nobler than mere animal enjoyments. But if he erred about the end, he judged better of the means proper to attain the end he proposed. He had more sense than to recommend luxury and excess, as the best ways to enjoy pleasure in the greatest perfection. He rejects them as its implacable enemies, disowns the intemperate for his disciples, and condemns them as the veriest fools in nature. This diligent studier and

zealous patron of pleasure thought it derived its chief heightening from moderate use; and boasted, that, while he lived upon the produce of his ordinary garden, he could equal the gods themselves in happiness. The precepts of his philosophy, and the maxims, by which he governed his life, would be as ill relished by a modern debauchee, as the gravest sermon, and as little regarded.

That you may enjoy pleasure in the best manner, the main thing you are to seek for, is a good appetite. Bread and water, recommended by hunger and thirst, will be attended with far more grateful sensations, than the most curious meats and the richest wines, if an appetite be wanting. And the means, to obtain a sound appetite, are labour and abstinence. It is necessary then, that you abandon sloth, and patiently wait the demands of nature. If you accustom yourself to a luxurious diet, your taste will soon be corrupted, you will relish neither common nor uncommon food, and nothing will any longer be thoroughly agreeable. High-living is therefore an enemy to pleasure. When nature calleth, if you have not vitiated your taste

taste by former luxury, it were a needless solicitude, to search out rare and costly delicacies. And as you must wait, till nature calleth, so you must leave off as soon as she is satisfied: if you proceed further, all beyond is languid or cloying; if not immediately attended, it will soon be followed by disgust; besides it injures both ease and health, along with which pleasure also will vanish.

These rules, severe as some persons may think them, we must observe, if we would gratify our senses in the most exquisite manner. From whence it is evident, that the active and sober enjoy the most, and lazy debauchees the least pleasure of any men upon earth; though the latter professedly make it the end of their pursuits, and resign for its sake all other enjoyments.

Fortune, health, ease, pleasure, each of them suffer by luxury and intemperance. It is also well enough known, how a man's credit in the world is affected by a dissolute course of life: how he stains his character, forfeits the confidence of mankind, and is shunned by considerate persons, as a corrupter of society and good manners. Heaven be praised! we

are not yet arrived to such a pass, as generally to approve a debauched character. We still allow it, though perhaps not its due share, yet some degree of infamy and reproach; and if there are those, who do not despise it, one would not methinks be very ambitious of their esteem. With whatever indulgence the debauched herd may sometimes be treated, or how highly soever they may see good to think of themselves, it is certain, the whole creation doth not afford a greater monster than a drunken man; nor doth any character in human life appear more despicable and mean to all wise and good men, than that of a drunkard.

There is scarce any thing so bad, as not to be capable of serving to some good purpose: the truth of which maxim you will be less apt to suspect, when you find it confirmed in the unpromising instance of a drunken man. Such a one exhibits to young persons a spectacle, that may improve their minds, and strengthen them against this vice, more than all the precepts and instructions in the world. Hence it was the practice, we are told, in a certain nation, famous for the wisdom of its laws and customs, to make a
slave

slave drunk, and expose him in that condition, as a spectacle to their children. They thought, it seems, that to let their children observe, into what beastly and contemptible creatures intemperance converts men, was a likely way to create in them a settled hatred of debauchery and excess. Though we have no slaves to abuse for this purpose, we cannot justly complain, that our youth are in want of these edifying spectacles. Would to God, they made a right improvement of them; and that every man, who derides or pities a drunkard, was seriously concerned never to become such an object himself.

Farther, Intemperance disqualifies a man for the offices of life, and makes him useless and despicable in all relations.

If we were to run over all the employments and offices of life, we should find, that intemperance is but an ill qualification for any of them, and renders a man less useful and valuable in society, let the rank and station he holds in it, be what they will.

A debauchee therefore, whatever merit he may think proper to assume to himself, really deserves very ill from his

friends, and from mankind in general: as will appear more fully, if we consider, that intemperance is often the cause of many other vices, which either immediately attend it, or follow at a distance. Among such as commonly attend it, we may reckon prophaneness, and a neglect of all the rules of decency and good manners. Add to these a wild licence of speech, folly in divulging its own, and baseness in betraying the secrets of its friend. Drunkenness is a voluntary frenzy; for wherein does he that is drunk differ from a madman? except in this indeed, that his madness perhaps does not last so long.

Wine makes fools of all men, but it produceth different kinds of folly according to the difference of their tempers. The good-natured man it turns into an idiot, in others it inflames the most mischievous passions. It heightens pride into insupportable arrogance, jealousy into distraction, anger into fury. The best we can expect from one in these circumstances are petulant humours and abusive treatment, which move our resentment, but do not excite our horror: and if nothing more tragical happens, it
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is fortunate for those about him, as well as for the unhappy wretch himself.

A cruel and rough disposition is a common effect of habitual intemperance. The drunkard, even in his sober intervals, enjoys but little of genuine serenity and good humour. His spirit, after having suffered such violent agitations, doth not suddenly recover its calm; but, continuing to be chafed and fretted with its own miseries, vents itself in ill-nature to others, in rancour and spleen towards those, who have a right to his tenderest regards. Repeated debauches exasperate his temper, sour his affections, and render habitual those savage passions, that are produced by excess. And as intemperance corrupts the heart, so it has the most fatal influence on the understanding. It insensibly blunts the apprehension, weakens the judgment, and impairs the memory; and thus by degrees reduces the mind into a state of deplorable sottishness and stupidity.

Excess therefore makes way for all manner of depravity, introducing into the minds of men the most fatal disorders, and into their lives a long train of detestable vices.

As to a future state; the scriptures, in which Almighty God has revealed his unchangeable purpose, expressly declare; that "drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God." In vain therefore will be your faith, your prayers, and religious observances; in vain do you assume the garb of sanctity, and regularly attend on divine institutions; if by these things you propose to atone for your debaucheries. Unless to piety and devotion you add temperance, and purity of heart and life, you have no reason to hope for happiness at last: and whoever teaches you, by any means, to reconcile the expectation of heaven to a dissolute life, deceives you in your most grand and important concern.

And here I must not omit the arguments used by our Saviour, to enforce the caution contained in the text. "Take heed," says he, "lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and so that day, the awful day of judgment, come upon you unawares." A consideration, which, one would think, might awaken the most stupid sinner. Do we not observe, that men frequently die in fits of intem-

intemperance? and have you any assurance, that, after your next debauch, you will not find yourself in another world? Take heed therefore to yourself; for certainly it is dreadful beyond expression, to rush into eternity, and appear before the pure and holy God, in order to receive your decisive sentence, with a polluted and guilty mind.

But the sovereign power is merciful, and therefore, you trust, he will not punish you for enjoying your pleasures. Your principle here is certain, but the inference, you draw from it, false and deceitful. "God is merciful;" but in that sense merciful, as to be at the same time just and pure. "God is merciful;" but he has none of that weak clemency and easiness of nature, which would suffer men to escape with impunity, while they persist in violating his laws. That very goodness, on which you build your hope, will itself incline him to punish you, and ought more than any thing to make you tremble? For, if he is perfectly good, he will certainly dispose of you hereafter, as shall be for the best. Now it is best in every government, both divine and human, that all sorts of iniquity

quity should be punished, and intemperance among the rest. As sure then as God is good, nay for that very reason, because he is good, whoever leads an impure and dissolute life, and dies unreformed, shall hereafter feel the scourge of his justice.

But surely, you hope, God will not punish you merely for enjoying your pleasures. That is to say; though you have debased the nature he has given you, neglected the offices of virtue, and been guilty of many foul disorders, by which you have injured human society, as well as your own family and friends; yet, forasmuch as you aimed at nothing in all this, besides the enjoyment of sensual pleasure, God, you are persuaded, will exempt you from punishment. Thus one man steals, another commits adultery, that they may enjoy their pleasure. Now let the thief and the adulterer plead before a human court; that they ought not to be punished for their respective crimes, because they committed them only for the sake of their own pleasure: what, I beseech you, would you think of the judge, who upon such a plea should acquit the offender? And yet you risk
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your salvation upon it, that the Sovereign Judge, whose name you invoke, will act in the same manner towards you, when you shall appear before him in judgment.

From the whole then, it is evident, that the fruit of intemperance is misery, both here and hereafter.

If arguments could have any weight with those who have contracted habits of intemperance, they offer themselves in plenty; arguments, plain as day, and important, as all that is to be desired in this world, and prayed for in the next. Your mind suffers, your understanding is impaired, your heart corrupted, and your character stained by intemperance. Fortune, health, and even pleasure, your favourite passion, plead earnestly against it. And what satisfaction would it give your real friends and all good men, to see you change your course of life! Your family mourns your excess and society justly complains that it is injured. Lastly, God commands, and eternity warns you to amend and reform.

But you cannot abstain. What! if you were assured at that very instant, that the liquor was poisoned, as indeed
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to you it always is, would you not convince us, you had power to abstain at your pleasure? Alas! this is a mere frivolous excuse; for God knows, and you know well enough, that nothing is faulty, besides your own will.

It is true indeed, you cannot reform without some difficulty; but then you cannot persist without infinitely greater. If a tooth does but ach, you readily consent to endure some pain, that your grievance may be removed; and will you bear nothing in order to be cured, when your mind labours under a most malignant and dangerous distemper? The pains of reformation will soon be over, and when once it is accomplished, the relief and satisfaction, you will find within yourself, will exceed whatever you can possibly imagine; whereas, if you proceed in the way, in which you are now engaged, your guilt and wretchedness will be continually increasing, and will issue at last in remediless misery. The longer you delay the work of repentance, the more difficult you will find it to reform. Your sensual inclinations will become stronger upon every new indulgence, and you will soon have acquired
such.

such a habit of trifling, as will engage you to trifle on, as long as you live. Seize, then, the passing moment, which alone is yours, for it is never too soon to be wise and happy.

To conclude, Let me earnestly intreat those who have hitherto escaped the snares of intemperance, and especially the young, to be upon their guard against this vice. Be not offended, that I exhort you to be upon your guard; for many a promising youth has been ruined through a confidence of his own security. It is the condition of mortality always to be exposed to temptations, and whoever thinks himself absolutely safe, threatens to be a sinner. If you boldly venture to the utmost limits of temperance; if you regard place, time and company, as things indifferent; if you begin to dally with vice, and walk heedless among its snares, your wise friends will tremble with the apprehension, that you will one day become an abandoned profligate. You have heard perhaps, that a little extravagance is allowable in youth, and that a single debauch is a small matter: but certainly a drunken habit is no small matter, and all habits are formed by degrees.

grees. After the first offence, the same excuse will serve for a second, and be more easily admitted; for the restraints both of honour and conscience will be weakened. You should therefore be careful to preserve inviolate the chastity of your manners, and take heed, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness:

You must have a low taste indeed, if the bare gratification of appetite can prevail upon you at first to like debauchery. But it is not enough, that you are superior to the allurements of sensual pleasures; for even your own sociableness and modesty, if not conducted with prudence, may prove the most dangerous snares to your virtue. The former may be apt to lead you into loose company, and the latter to carry you along with them into all their excesses. But you may do well to remember, that as a mere fondness for company without distinction is no very commendable quality; so a fondness for debauched company is a vice, little, if at all, inferior to even a fondness for debauchery itself. In proportion as you grow more intimate with such persons, your aversion to their manners will wear
off

off by degrees, till you come at last to imitate and approve them. They have, it may be, some good qualities, which tempt you to associate with them. You are pleased with their wit and chearfulness: and are you not shocked at their odious and abominable excesses? Can you find any great satisfaction in that society, where you must of necessity either reproach others by your singular moderation, or ruin yourself by a compliance with their humours? Is their conversation really so improving or so pleasant, as that you should prefer it, though at the hazard of being infected with intemperance, the worst of human plagues? But admit you escape the infection, you will share however in the infamy of their vices; for the world will conclude, and not without reason, that if you do not already, you soon will resemble the men, you chuse for your friends and companions. Besides, I hope, good humour and wit are not peculiar to men of loose morals. You may doubtless find these qualities in as great perfection in persons, whose characters are thoroughly amiable, from whose conversation you may receive equal entertainment, without meeting
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with the like distaste, or running any hazard of being insensibly engaged in dissolute life. It will therefore be an argument of your good taste, no less than of your prudence, if you avoid the intimacy of such as are debauched, whatever they may be in other respects. You should remember also, that to comply with the humour of your companions in any thing, that is contrary to the laws of God and reason, let men call this modesty, let them call it good nature, or what they please, it is unmanly and shameful.

Wherefore it is but a poor excuse, which some urge in their own behalf; "I was afraid of being ridiculed and thought singular." For, first, What have you to do with such companions, whose ridicule you cannot bear, nor escape it without forfeiting your innocence? But I should rather ask; Why do you regard the censures of those, who are despised by every wise and honest man? You should rather esteem it matter of glory, than, blushing when you are derided by rakes and profligates, on account of sobriety. I do not say, you should make no account of their scorn; no, you ought to prize it, as the best
testimony

testimony such persons are capable of bearing to your character and merit. If by mean compliances you seek to recommend yourself to the vile and licentious, these very persons will despise you in the end, and you are sure to be condemned by all the worthy part of mankind. Whereas, if you steadily persevere in a course of virtue, the fools themselves, who now deride, will soon begin to reverence your character; or the honour and respect, you will infallibly gain from the wise and good, will make you rich amends for all the contempt they can pour upon you.

Upon the whole, then, Forfeit not upon any account the praise you have merited, in beginning life so well; and do not disappoint the hopes you have raised in your friends concerning you. Let it be your fixed resolution, at all times and in all companies, to preserve your temperance. This will conduce to your outward prosperity and success in the world, and be a good step towards establishing a firm and lasting reputation. This will contribute not a little to the health and ease both of your body and mind. This will be one excellent qualification

fication for being serviceable in society, and for creating in mankind a confidence in you. This will prepare you for a life at once the most pleasant, useful, and honourable. In a word, In this plain humble virtue of temperance the foundation is laid of every other virtue, and consequently of happiness in time and eternity.

S E R M O N XIII.

THE INEFFICACY OF A
DEATH-BED REPENTANCE.

NUMBERS XXIII. 10.

*Let me die the death of the righteous, and
let my last end be like his.*

OF all the snares whereby the deceitfulness that is in sin betrays sinners, and hardens them in a vicious course, there is none more dangerous than their flattering themselves they may go on securely in sin, in the hopes of setting all
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to rights at last, by a late or a death-bed repentance. There is hardly any snare in which so many sinners are caught, to their utter ruin.* Few, if any, who have only the light of nature and moral conscience to guide them, as all mankind have, can be supposed absolutely insensible, that an obstinately vicious disposition is inconsistent with the true happiness of a reasonable creature: there are none who are favoured with the light of the Gospel, and have any regard to it, but may easily be sensible of the inconsistency of such a disposition with that happiness in the other world, which is there brought to light. Scarce any one, therefore, who professes Christianity, can be supposed so hardened in impiety as not to be apprehensive that he is unsafe in a vicious course; that his present state is bad and dangerous, and that he must be ruined for ever, if he always continues in it. But wrong notions and presumptuous hopes of the mercy of God, vain apprehensions of the easiness of that repentance at last, the hardness of which makes him put it off now, concur with the sinner's love of his vicious lusts and evil ways, to make him flatter himself he may go on all his life

life in that beloved indulgence, and make himself easy in the hopes of retrieving all at last, by a late regret and dying sorrow for an ill-spent life.

I shall therefore in this discourse endeavour to prove, That the very possibility, or, at least, all hope of retrieving the misery of an ill-spent life, and escaping the wages of sin in another world, by a late or death-bed repentance, is absolutely excluded by the nature and design of religion, and by the strain of the plainest decisions of the Holy Scriptures, particularly of the New Testament.

Having established this point, I shall have clearly illustrated the folly of Balaam's conduct, and of all wicked men, who say, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his," while they neglect to lead such a life as alone can prepare them for a happy death.

Upon the supposition of a future state, it may be shewn, with the greatest evidence of reason, that not only beginnings, but considerable improvements in virtue, are necessary to fit us for the happiness of it. And that,

First, From the nature of God, on whose perfections and moral character the surest reasonings in religion are founded.

It is the unalterable property of his nature, that he is perfectly holy, entirely removed from and averse to all moral pollution and defilement: from whence we may certainly conclude, that "evil cannot dwell with him;" that the wicked and impure can have no fellowship with him; for he "hateth all the workers of iniquity:" withal, he "looks not only on the outward appearance," as men do, but "looks into the heart;" and therefore, regards not the specious professions, and fairest outward appearances, where the heart is not right with him; and where it is, this will discover itself in the tenor of the life and conduct; for "a good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things."

It plainly appears then, from the unalterable moral character of God, that it is only so far as we improve in goodness and moral excellency, that we can increase in his favour, and advance to our true happiness in fellowship with him; and that,

that, to be perfectly happy, we must be perfectly holy and good.

Let us consider, in the same view, the nature of man, and the condition in which he is placed in this world. His mind is endued with the noblest capacities, both for contemplation and for action; and the seeds of good affections, of benevolence and the love of goodness, are implanted in our frame: but these capacities must be improved by careful exercise, in order to their being put to their proper uses, and our reaping the advantage of them and the enjoyments for which they qualify us. These seeds of goodness must be cherished by diligent culture, in order to their arriving at that extent and improvement, which will issue in a complete and confirmed state of piety and virtue, and of rational and virtuous happiness. When first we receive the happy turn and disposition, to set about this culture and improvement in good earnest, we are then entered on the true way to happiness: but a great part of our work remains, to carry forward these good beginnings; and we cannot, certainly, be reckoned to have finished this work when

we have only begun it. Moreover, we are creatures of a mixed frame: as we have spirits formed for the noblest purposes, so we have material bodies liable to various frailties: in order to the support of these bodies, and to suit our present condition in this world, we are endued with various appetites and passions; which, in their regular state, are not only useful but necessary to our present frame and situation; but are apt, without careful restraint and watchful culture, to grow extravagant and excessive: and we are surrounded with various objects, suited to these inferior appetites and passions, which are apt to draw us off from those spiritual exercises and improvements that belong and contribute to the perfection and happiness of our better part. It therefore becomes a matter of great and long exercise, to regulate our inferior passions and appetites, and bring them into due order; to cultivate and improve the affections of divine love and brotherly kindness; to subdue the flesh to the spirit, and bring our lower appetites into subjection to our more exalted affections: this is a work, according to all the views that reason and experience
give

give us of it, not to be performed at once; not without frequent efforts, and a constant struggle. And this is our exercise here, in this state of imperfection, in order to our advancement to a state of perfection and complete happiness in a better world, where virtue will be triumphant, and become superior to all disturbance or opposition.

If we further consider the nature of our own true happiness; we must be sensible, that it is not of so much importance what place we are in, as what spirit we are of; what enjoyments we are possessed of, as what temper we are in to relish them. If our minds are formed into the temper of bliss, and we enjoy the highest satisfactions our nature is capable of, we shall be happy wherever we have the temper and enjoyment; but, if we are destitute of the temper of bliss, change of place will signify nothing; for we can be happy no where. Heaven, therefore, is not so much a different place from that where we now are, as a different state from the present; and it is by the temper of our minds we must make our approaches to it. The perfection of any creature is the foundation of its happiness;

pinefs; and the utmost happinefs any creature is capable of, is only to be obtained in the ftate of its utmost perfection: and as the true perfection of fuch creatures as we are, confifts in rational and virtuous improvements, it is only fo far as we advance in thefe that we can enjoy our true happinefs; and, in all nature, the moft perfect ftate of any creature does not take place all at once, but arifes from fmall beginnings, by a gradual and beautiful progrefs. We are creatures formed not barely for contemplation, but for action and employment; to be ufeful to one another, and to find our perfection and happinefs, not only in the contemplation of the moft glorious object of our thoughts, but in the proper exercife of our active powers. The abilities our great Creator has furnifhed us with, the affections he has implanted in our hearts, the circumftances in which he has placed us in this world, do plainly fhew that we are formed by him not to be idle, or merely contemplative, but active and ufeful creatures; and thus to improve in a truly amiable character, and a capacity for happinefs in the moft perfect fociety: a happinefs founded in a temper of entire

tire good affection to the general welfare
 of the rational world; and of hearty de-
 votion, and allegiance to the kind Fa-
 ther and universal Governor of the ratio-
 nal kingdom. For, not only are we
 formed for the exercise of love and be-
 neficence towards those of our own kind;
 but for a more extensive exercise of kind-
 ness and good-will towards the whole
 body of reasonable beings; and the high-
 est love and devotion to the perfectly
 wise and good Governor of the world;
 a hearty affection to his government, by
 which the general happiness is secured;
 an entire submission to his orders, and
 resignation to all his wise appointments.
 This temper and conduct is the most
 proper exercise and improvement of our
 noblest powers; the true perfection of
 our nature; and the foundation of our
 highest happiness, which must be found-
 ed in the disposition of our minds: this
 temper will afford the greatest enjoyment
 we can have in our present state, so far
 as it prevails; and, in its perfection, is
 the foundation of the highest and most
 lasting joy: and we can only advance
 towards perfect bliss, so far as we im-
 prove in this.

To conclude this branch of the argument: All enjoyment, of any kind, necessarily supposes a taste for that kind of enjoyment; nor can our satisfaction, in any entertainment, rise higher than our relish for it is improved. Now, the true happiness of such creatures as we are is not to be found in the whole circle of outward things, nor in the highest gratifications of sense; but in such rational and virtuous enjoyments, as a mere sensual man has no relish for; in which no man can have delight, but so far as he is improved in true goodness and divine love, has subdued the flesh to the spirit, and brought his inferior appetites in subjection to those nobler dispositions.

But the proofs of this great point drawn from the declarations of holy scripture are peculiarly striking; and should be of special force with those who profess to believe the christian revelation, and to derive their chief comfort and hopes of future happiness from it.

It is plainly declared to be the main design of the gospel, and of our blessed Saviour's coming into the world, and his death, to recover and reclaim men
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from sin and bring them back to that conformity to the Supreme Being in holiness, in which, and in his favour, their only true happiness lies. In compassion to the wretched circumstances of sinful men, fallen from their true happiness and become miserable, by having fallen from true goodness; the Son of God came into this world, to deliver men from this degenerate and miserable condition. It may be obvious to an attentive and serious consideration, that, in this wretched state of human nature, our sin and moral depravity is, in its own nature and influence, the worst part of our calamity, and the cause of all the rest; and it is only so far as we are delivered from this, that we can be freed from those evils which naturally attend it and follow upon it. And therefore it must be the chief design of a Saviour, who would effectually deliver us from misery, and bring us to true happiness, in the first place to save us from our vices, and bring us back to holiness and not merely to such low and faint beginnings of goodness, as can go but a very little way to restore our peace

and promote our inward enjoyment; but to such improvements in all piety and virtue, as may be a natural progress towards a state of perfection in holiness, the foundation of perfect bliss.

But I proceed to observe, that the promises of future happiness are, throughout the tenor of Holy Scripture, made to a holy and good life; without the least hint of the alternative, that a man repents at last his having neglected it: and the threatnings of future punishment, to the “workers of iniquity”, as they are most positive and peremptory, so are they made without the least reserve or exception; particularly, without the exception of a man’s bitterly regretting at last that he had been so.

Our blessed Lord tells us expressly, that “when he shall come in the glory of his Father, with his holy angels; then he shall reward every man according to his works”. And he warns his hearers, that “the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice; and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.” When the Apostle Peter was taught

taught by an heavenly vision; he says, "of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." And the like sentiment he expresses, when he says that the Father, "without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work;" and therefore, they who call on him must "pass the time of their sojourning here in fear." And, the Apostle Paul expressly declares, that God will at last "render to every man according to his deeds: to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, indignation and wrath, upon every soul of man that doth evil; but glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good.

And in his Epistle to the Galatians, he says, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap". Here the similitude is plainly taken from a thing, the reverse of which is possible with Almighty God; but so contrary to the course of nature,

that no man expects it, any more than if it was impossible. Let us put the case, that a man sows tares in his field: it is possible, with Almighty God, that he shall reap the finest wheat. But did ever any man, of a sound mind, entertain such an expectation? How absurd would it appear, for any one to think, by the most bitter regret and hearty repentance, to retrieve such a bad sowing, and reap the quite contrary grain; unless, in time, he plucked up the tares, and sowed the grain he wished to reap! As absurd is it, according to the Apostle's comparison and awful warning, for the sinner to expect, by the most hearty regret and deepest sorrow, to escape the misery a vicious course has exposed him to; when he has no opportunity to undo what he has been doing all his life, and betake himself to a better course. In the natural sense, no man, from a mere possibility of the thing, ever expects to reap another kind of grain than he sows; even though God has no where declared, that it shall not be; as he has plainly declared, that "they who sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption", in opposition to "life everlasting"; by which

which all the vain hopes the sinner can pretend to raise from the mere possibility of its being otherwise, are utterly overthrown: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked".

I observe, in the next place, that there is no one promise in the whole Word of God, which gives the least countenance or encouragement to the hopes of those who go on in a sinful course, in the expectation of retrieving all at last, by a death-bed sorrow, and flying to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus in their last moments.

That the promises made to faith and repentance admit of no such construction; will be abundantly evident, if it be considered that these promises are not made to them, considered as single acts; but, agreeably to their nature, as effectual principles of all those dispositions, and that course of behaviour, which is requisite to render us meet for the heavenly bliss: so that, whatever in the nature of things and according to the tenor of the gospel, is necessary to salvation, is either included in them, or naturally flows from them as the genuine and effectual principles of it. True faith renders the
soul

soul like a good tree, which naturally bringeth forth good fruit: it lodges a good treasure in the heart; from whence the good man bringeth forth good things. True repentance, as it chiefly consists in amendment, is the proper and real beginning of that patient continuance in well-doing, which leads to glory, honour, and immortality.

The repentance and faith, to which the promises of salvation are made, are plainly described, in Scripture, to be such, as actually and in fact are the real beginnings of a holy and good life: so that, no faith and repentance which any sinner can have at the close of a bad life, can come up to these descriptions. And the reason is obvious; because the necessary meetness and preparation for the enjoyments of a state of perfection, does not arise from what a man would do, in obedience to God and Christ, if he had opportunity; but from what he actually does; not from those improvements he would attain to, but from what he actually does attain. Particularly; that repentance, to which the promises of pardon and salvation are made, is never described as consisting in
mere

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mere sorrow for sin, however deep or bitter; nor is sorrow so much as declared to belong to it, for itself; but rather preparatory to it, and requisite as subservient to the further purpose, of the reformation and amendment of heart and life, in which true repentance lies. Remarkably to this purpose, is that passage of the Apostle; "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed unto repentance; for godly sorrow worketh repentance. Therefore, sorrow itself is not repentance; but, even when it is most sincere, is only introductory to it: and repentance itself lies in that amendment, which is the fruit of godly sorrow. Another man's grief and inward pain, can, of itself, be no pleasure to a good and generous heart: and can that of itself, be acceptable to God, which can be no pleasure to any good man? Surely, God, who desires our happiness, can have no pleasure in our pain or grief; but only so far as it is necessary, and of influence, to make us truly better. The occasion of the mistake of many, concerning this matter, seems to be this: in the common acceptation of the word, a man is said to
repent

repent of that which he is grieved for having done; though that grief has no further effect: but, with whatever propriety this may be called repenting in common speech (though no man would believe, that one is heartily sorry he had wronged him, if he goes on to injure him still, and does not, in his after-conduct, do him good offices, if he can) however, such a fruitless sorrow is not repentance, in a religious sense; not that repentance which the Gospel requires, and to which it promises pardon and salvation; which, in all the descriptions of it, is declared to have its finishing and proof in actual reformation and amendment; and to be such as actually produces newness of life.

In like manner; that faith in Christ, to which the promises of salvation are made, is not a mere assent to any doctrines; nor a confident reliance on the mercy of God or the merits of Christ, without complying with the terms of the divine mercy in Christ Jesus: but, is such a receiving of Christ for our Saviour and Lord, as subjects the soul to his government; gives him the rule in the heart; and produces obedience to his

his laws, in the life: it is described to be such a faith, as purifies the heart, and worketh by love.

Now, if that repentance and faith in Christ, to which the promises of salvation are made, are plainly described to be such as actually are the real beginnings of a holy and good life; can such descriptions possibly agree with any repentance and faith a dying sinner can have in the close of a bad life? whose repentance, perhaps, amounts to no more than a cold, or, at most, a warm and passionate, "God have merc, upon me"; at best, is a mere fruitless sorrow and regret; though, perhaps, rendered more passionate, by his present strong terror, and fearful looking for of judgment: whose faith, like that of devils, is a mere assent to divine truths with trembling; or, perhaps, so cold an assent, as not even to be attended with trembling; or such a confident reliance on the mercy of God, or merits of Christ, as may more justly be called presumption?

It is then abundantly evident, That there is no one promise, in the whole Word of God, that gives the least encouragement to the hopes of those who go
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on in a sinful course to the close of their lives: and that the promises of salvation made to repentance and faith in Christ, afford no manner of exception to this assertion; nor do, in the least, derogate from the absolute necessity of a holy life to the happiness of heaven.

Lastly, I observe, that there is no one instance, recorded in scripture, of that repentance being accepted of God, or availing to an entrance into the heavenly bliss, which was deferred to the last; or, had its beginning only in the close of a bad life.

The parable of the labourers called into the vineyard, respecting not the calling of particular persons to repentance, but of the gentiles into the church of Christ, hath nothing to do with the present argument. And there is only one instance, that can be so much as pretended to be brought from scripture, of a person, who had all his life gone on in a vicious course, being saved at last, and upon a repentance not begun till his last moments; that of the penitent thief, who was crucified with our blessed Saviour: so that, if this is plainly shown to be no instance of that nature, the careless and secure sinner must

must be deprived of the only resource he may hitherto have imagined to remain to him, in the whole word of God, to encourage his deferring his repentance to the last, and yet entertaining hopes of mercy and salvation.

Now whoever takes a fair and impartial view of this narrative will see, that it does by no means plainly appear that this penitent had ever been an habitual sinner, for any considerable time, in the former course of his life: there is not one bad thing said of him, in all the account we have in scripture concerning him, but that he was guilty of an act of theft, which by his own confession, deserved a capital punishment: and he may, for any thing we are told, have been surprised, through weakness, or tempted by want, to the crime he committed; and having met with his just condemnation for the first, and the only instance of it he had been guilty of.—That even though it plainly appeared, that he had been an habitual sinner in his former life; and had run into the capital crime for which he was condemned, as the result of a preceding loose and abandoned course; yet we have no ground given us to determine,

termine, that the application he here makes to our blessed Lord was the first beginning of his repentance; but may, as well, suppose, that he had begun it long before; so as, by this time, to have arrived at a great height of piety and goodness: it may, for any thing we are told, have been a long time since he was guilty of the crime, before he suffered for it; during all which time, he may have been going on in a course of sincere repentance and thorough amendment: and, if it may be so, for any thing we are here told; then it is plain, we have no ground here given us to reckon it was otherwise.—And that even in this short narrative here given us of the character of this penitent, and of his behaviour in his last moments, there are not wanting some positive marks of such a strength of virtue, as it is not natural to expect in a new convert, who had been, till that moment, a hardened sinner. In his humble application to Christ, amidst the lowest circumstances of the ignominy of his cross, he discovers such an uncommon strength of faith, and of virtue and courage added to that faith, as it is by no means natural to suppose, a man who

who had hitherto been hardened in sin and impenitency would arrive at, all at once: he not only believes in Jesus, but has the courage to make an open declaration of his faith in him, as Lord and King; of a kingdom not of this world; in which he should reckon it his happiness to be remembered, even after his death: and all this he does not only when he could have no manner of external encouragement to it; but also while all outward circumstances, and the temper and behaviour of all about him, tended strongly to discourage him from it: our blessed Saviour was now lifted up upon a cross; distinguished by ignominy and disgrace; delivered up to the rage and contempt of the people; mocked by the Gentiles, and despised by the Jews; one of his own disciples had basely betrayed him; another, whom he had highly favoured, had, with a strange mixture of cowardice before men and boldness with the name of God, shamefully denied him (a crime far worse, and of a more complicated nature, than any this penitent is charged with:) all the rest had forsaken him and fled: when our Saviour is thus brought to these
lowest

lowest circumstances of abasement; this man, amidst all the indignities thrown upon him, openly acknowledges him as Lord and King of the invisible world: in all which he discovers a strength of faith, love, and heavenliness of mind; not to be found, in the present circumstances of our blessed Lord, even in any of those disciples who had been long with him! Is this like a man hitherto hardened in wickedness; and who had never begun to relent, till this moment?

But enough has been said, and perhaps more than enough, to shew that we have here no instance given us, of a person saved at last, upon a repentance begun in his dying moments, who had gone on all his life in a sinful course. And, if the careless and secure sinner is thus deprived of the only instance he could pretend to bring, from the whole word of God, to support his hopes of obtaining mercy at last, upon a late repentance, or dying regret for a whole life spent in sin; let him no longer flatter himself with such vain hopes; but speedily flee from the wrath to come, by an immediate compliance with the call of the Gospel.

And

And now, methinks, I have abundantly proved, that, as there is no one promise, so there is no one instance, in the whole Word of God, of any exception to the plain and peremptory declarations in the Gospel, of the absolute necessity of a holy life to the happiness of heaven; and that this necessity is without any reserve or exception in favour of a death-bed repentance.

To all those who have hitherto lived in the habitual practice of sin, the doctrine we have been establishing speaks this language; "Behold, *now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation. If ye will *now* enter heartily upon a pious and good life, ye shall have your fruit unto holiness; shall enjoy, even here, the present fruits of peace and pleasure in all the ways of wisdom; and your end shall be everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Lord." But, if you refuse to comply with this *present* call of God, and trifle away the *present* opportunity; no man on earth can assure you, that it shall not be *your last*: therefore "to-day, if you will hear God's voice, harden not your hearts"!

“ hearts ” ! left you be irrecoverably
“ hardened by the deceitfulness that is in
sin ; ” and provoke God to pass an irre-
versible sentence against you, that you
“ shall never enter into his heavenly
rest ” !

S E R-

S E R M O N XIV.

MORAL REFLECTIONS ON THE
HISTORY OF JOSEPH.

GENESIS XXXIX. 9.

*How then can I do this great wickedness,
and sin against God?*

THERE is no branch of ancient private history more remarkable, than that of the patriarch Joseph: whether we regard the characters of the actors, the surprising revolutions, the extremes of
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fortune, the variety, or importance, of the events contained in it. And of this history, there is no part more affecting and useful than that to which the text relates: if we consider it either as affording an example of manly resolution; or of heroick virtue first oppressed, and, in the end, victorious and triumphant; or with respect to the moral instructions that may be deduced from it. The substance of the fact is this: Joseph, being betrayed by his brethren, was sold as a slave to Potiphar, an officer of distinction under the king of Egypt. His good qualities gained him the esteem and affection of his master, who preferred him to manage all the affairs of his family. But here an accident happened, that was likely to have blasted all his schemes of happiness. The wife of Potiphar tempted him to lewdness: which he, reflecting on the heinousness of the crime of adultery in itself (which is branded with peculiar infamy by every civilized nation, and held in the utmost detestation by almost all, who retain any sense of the difference of good and evil) reflecting likewise on the baseness of ingratitude and treachery towards so kind a benefactor, and the
great

great offence he should be guilty of against the Creator and Sovereign of the world, rejected with a warm and generous resentment. Upon this the passions of his mistress took another turn equally violent, and she brought a false accusation against him for attempting her chastity: and Potiphar, confiding in her honour, committed him to prison. Now he seems to have been quite lost, and abandoned to misery and despair; but vain are the counsels of man: for this very circumstance was the occasion of his being introduced into the presence of Pharaoh, and of his appearing again, on the stage of the world with extraordinary lustre and dignity, for the preservation and support of his own family, which afterwards sprang up into a great and flourishing nation. This account, everyone must perceive, suggests several useful observations; among which I shall fix on two or three to be the subject of the following discourse.

And the first is immediately pointed out to us by the text itself, namely, that the fear of God, and a serious regard to his authority, is a most effectual preservative from all criminal indulgences. It was

this that restrained Joseph from complying with the loose solicitations of his mistress, and gave him a perfect superiority and command over his passions. A sense of the injustice of the action, and how highly provoking it must be to heaven, had he been guilty of such vile perfidiousness against a man, who had used him with so much confidence and generosity, kept under the impulses of sense and appetite, and quite baffled the force of this dangerous temptation. And a becoming reverence of the deity will have the same effect on all mankind, upon all other occasions, and in every scene of life. If it be only occasional, it will indeed, do no more than check our inclinations in some particular instances, and limit our excesses; but when it is become a fixed habitual principle, it will have an uniform constant efficacy in preserving the passions regular, and the conversation honest, and untainted by any gross degrees of wickedness. For no man was ever yet of so resolute and daring a temper, as to allow himself in a dissolute course of life, under an immediate quick apprehension of the divine displeasure: he cannot offend the Deity at the same time that he feels

feels an inward esteem of him, and gratitude for his benefits; nor violate any law, while he has a strong conviction of the wisdom and goodness of the power that enacted it. These things are as absolute contradictions, as that approbation and dislike, reverence and contempt, love and hatred, should be exercised towards the same object at once: so that our sinful pursuits must either entirely extirpate the fear of God, or that will, of necessity, reform and cure our vices.

And that this excellent principle should have so powerful an influence against natural disposition, custom, the bewitching allurements of pleasure, and the most enchanting prospects of worldly advantage, will not seem strange to us when we consider; that it strikes every passion, every spring of human actions, and includes in it all the most powerful motives, by which the conduct of mankind is determined. If interest be the principal thing that sways with us; that, surely, cannot be so certainly promoted, as by securing the favour of Almighty God, and avoiding his displeasure which is the greatest of all evils. If we are governed by our fears; he is the most formidable Be-

ing in the universe to a depraved mind, that has perverted its faculties, and transgressed the law of its nature: if by hope; he is the supreme and an eternal good: if by love; he is most amiable and perfect excellence: if by gratitude; he is the cause of our existence, and the author of all our happiness. Or do we regard fitness, rectitude, and beauty in actions, and would be thought not to be driven by the terrors of authority, but to chuse virtue for its own sake and for the intrinsic reasonableness of it? I would ask, what can be more becoming, more agreeable to human nature, to eternal reason, and the nature of things, than to esteem supreme perfection, to venerate unbounded wisdom and power, and to be fearful of offending the greatest and most excellent of all Beings, the compassionate Father, uncontrollable Disposer and impartial Judge of mankind? The fear of God therefore, when it is a rooted principle in the heart, must restrain from the most intimate and highly favoured excesses; and beget an invincible resolution, which no assaults can subdue or intimidate.

Secondly, in the course of our observations, on this passage of sacred history,
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we are naturally led to consider the shamefulneſs and heinous guilt of ingratitude. This was the principal thing that Joſeph urged, againſt committing the crime to which he was ſo ſtrongly excited: that his maſter had committed all he had to his care, there was none greater in the houſe than he, neither had he kept back any thing from him but his wife, (whom all laws, divine and human had guarded as the moſt ſacred and inviolable part of his property) “ How then, ſays he, can I do this great wickedneſs, how can I be guilty of this baſe breach of truſt, againſt common equity and the moſt endearing obligations of friendſhip, while I have any ſenſe of ingenuity towards my benefactor, or reverence of Almighty God?” As a man, ſuch a conduct towards one of his own ſpecies was abſolutely indefenſible; but from a ſervant to his maſter, who had highly careſſed and honoured him, and loaded him with ſignal favours, it was ſo utterly unnatural, that whoever attempted it muſt be extravagantly wicked, and ſunk to the very loweſt pitch of degeneracy. Ingratitude, added to adultery, would have rendered what is, in itſelf, one of the

foulest stains to man's nature, infinitely more black and detestable; and have swelled the guilt of it to so vast a size, that it would scarcely have admitted of any further aggravation.

This indeed agrees with the unanimous opinion of mankind in all ages. They have ever stigmatized ingratitude, as the utmost depravation and reproach of human nature. Other immoralities have been moderated and speciously varnished over; but this has been constantly condemned, without one professed advocate to plead its cause. And yet, how inconsistent and unaccountable soever it may seem, it is more generally practised, in some view or other of it, than vices that are not half so infamous and shocking to the mind. The reason of which I apprehend to be this: that the charge of ingratitude is, oftentimes, not capable of clear and full proof; because that depends on innumerable circumstances and secret transactions, which cannot be thoroughly known nor distinctly specified; upon which account, it is generally not cognizable by human laws: so that men escape that punishment, and in a great measure that shame and ignominy, which
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as it can be fixed with more certainty, follows likewise more universally, on committing other acts of injustice. Besides they are apt in nothing so much, as with respect to particular instances of ingratitude, to impose upon themselves. The grosser cases, in which direct abuse and indignity are offered to a benefactor, are freely exclaimed against; but such as are less flagrant, either pass without censure because they are common, or for want of reflection are not duly attended to. I shall therefore just mention a few examples of this vice, which appear to be the most prevailing; and then shew, briefly, that it is a heinous degree of wickedness, which argues a thoroughly corrupted and profligate mind, and is attended with most fatal consequences.

In the first place, That man may be justly charged with ingratitude, who refuses, on all proper occasions, to acknowledge the kindness he has received, to the honour of his benefactor. This is the least return that can be made for offices of generosity and compassion; and whoever declines it deprives them of their natural just reward, the respect of mankind; and would, if possible, efface

all remembrance of them. To be shy of owning an obligation, argues an ignorant, conceited, base spirit, that aims at independency, and would fain be thought to be self-sufficient; though it be obvious to all, that man by the very frame of his nature is frail and impotent, and must in innumerable respects, without the friendly interposition of others, be helpless and miserable. A person of an ingenuous temper, therefore, considers it as no more a disgrace to him to be indebted to his fellow-creatures, for relieving his cares and assisting his imbecillity, than it is to be under a necessity of satisfying the appetites of hunger and thirst, and taking animal or vegetable nourishment for the support of life. On the contrary, he thankfully adores the wisdom of Providence in ordaining the mutual dependencies that there are amongst mankind, as they are the most powerful motive imaginable to universal love and charity; and is always ready to acknowledge the benefits which he has received, for the encouragement of good and beneficent actions.

And if it be ungrateful not to own an obligation, we must deserve the same bad character,

character, if we endeavour, by any means, to lessen it. This may be done various ways: by imputing it to wrong principles, to a desire of popularity, and the like; by insinuating that our benefactor did not design to do us good, so much as to serve himself, and, in the ostentation of his beneficence, acted only from selfishness; that the service he did us was not the effect of a charitable disposition, but extorted from him by importunity, and the influence of those whom he could not in prudence offend; that it was but a common favour that any man would do for another, and which was performed without difficulty or expence. Thus will ungrateful suspicions tarnish the best actions, and give them such an invidious turn as shall derogate greatly from their merit. This species of ingratitude proceeds from the same source as the former, from a stiff inflexible pride that cannot submit to acknowledge an obligation, and therefore industriously and maliciously detracts from it; from envy at superior goodness, that repines till it be blasted, and its lustre obscured; and from a malignant cankered heart, that does all its seeming specious offices of generosity from low and

vile motives, and is, therefore, disposed to ascribe to others the same iniquity and baseness of temper, which it feels in itself.

Again, a man may return the services done him in kind, and yet be ungrateful. If he confines himself to a strict retaliation, to just the same instances and degrees of help, he may, in the opinion of the world, discharge the debt of justice, but be shamefully defective in point of gratitude. For perhaps the person who assisted me, was one from whom I could have no claim, or just expectation, of particular friendship; and can I think him sufficiently paid for a free unmerited act of kindness, by doing him no favour at all, and only returning what he had a right to insist upon as his due? Or else the service he has done me might, in proportion to his circumstances, be exceedingly generous and noble; my performing the same for him and going no farther, if my condition be much more easy and plentiful, may be niggardly and penurious charity even to a stranger; but however that be, to such a benefactor it is so far from being a proper exercise of gratitude, that it falls short of common equity. Or, finally, the relief
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which he afforded me might be critical, in some special exigence and season of distress that threatned the ruin of my family, or, at least, the involving it in next to inextricable difficulties. If, therefore, when his affairs are embarrassed, and he requires a much larger succour, than my necessities demanded, to redeem him from want and misery, I am unaffected by his deplorable circumstances, and content myself with rendering back the very same proportion of help which I received from him, I may do him no service who did me the greatest; and, where there is a capacity of being more generous without any considerable inconvenience to myself, this must certainly argue a very insensible and barbarous disposition. There are some single favours so gracefully and obligingly bestowed, so well-timed and adapted to particular cases, and so vastly important in their consequences, that they cannot be fully requited but by the affection and devoted friendship of a whole life.

And now, it will easily be made to appear that ingratitude is so monstrous a vice, so foul a stain upon humanity, that it loudly calls for our utmost horror
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and detestation. To render evil for evil merely from a motive of private revenge, or, in other words, to be pleased with the sufferings of our fellow-creatures only because they have done us wrong, and without any regard to the public good, is savage and unnatural. It must be a more aggravated crime to injure those who have never offended us ; because this is cruelty without any provocation. Surely then, we cannot conceive how any reasonable creature can be more depraved, or arrive at a more diabolical excess of wickedness, than when it returns evil for good, abuse, calumny, and injustice for friendship, protection, and acts of charity. This is not only being malicious without a temptation, but against the strongest reasons to the contrary ; and consequently argues, that we have, in a great measure, rooted out all our humane and benevolent affections. Again, acknowledgment, respect, and returns of kindness to a benefactor are a debt of equity, and therefore ingratitude must be a vile mixture of injustice and inhumanity in the extreme of both ; a compound, which includes in it the seeds of all the blackest enormities that were ever committed.

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This vice is likewise inconsistent with the exercise of every social virtue. The ungrateful man will doubtless cheat and defraud his neighbour, and practise any other villany, when he thinks it to be for his interest, and that he may do it without being discovered: for what should restrain him? He feels no remorse for an offence of uncommon malignity, and it is not to be imagined, that he will be so absurdly squeamish as to stick at lesser immoralities. It cannot be expected unless it be from a principle of self-love which will but seldom operate this way, it cannot, I say, be expected, that he will do good to those who never obliged him when he uses his benefactors ill. There can be no friendship maintained with the ungrateful, who repay the most considerable services with indifference and contempt: and should this crime generally prevail, it must be an effectual discouragement to kind and compassionate offices among mankind, and have a direct tendency, in the end, to destroy public benevolence altogether. For there are few but would be weary of doing good, if they met with none but ungrateful returns; the ardor of their charity
would

would by degrees abate ; mutual assistances must be bargained for, as is now the case in matters of private right and property : and there could be but little of that officious goodness, that open communicative unsolicited benevolence, which searches for objects on which to exert itself, prevents the complaints of the miserable, and is, in short, the spring of the most desirable conveniences and comforts of human life.

Add to all this, that ingratitude to our fellow-creatures and to our great Creator are inseparably connected, and must necessarily go together. He that is unjust to one person, will in the opinion of the whole world, act a mere solemn farce, if he pretends conscience for the exercise of strict justice to another. His conscience can be only interest, or the necessity of his affairs that obliges him to be honest. If he imposes on strangers who place a confidence in him, no man will believe him when he professes, from a principle of morality, to be either true to his friend, or faithful to his prince. And it is an equal contradiction to suppose, that he who is ungrateful to men can be grateful to his God. So that this
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abominable vice eradicates all sense of piety, and, together with that (as has been before observed) destroys the very seeds of every social virtue.

* In the last place, it is one of the most remarkable parts of Joseph's history, that the lowest scene of his disgrace, the most melancholy, and, to human probability, desperate state of his affairs was the means of his advancement to eminent dignity in Pharaoh's court, and to be the first minister in his kingdom. From whence we are led to reflect on the wisdom of providence in so framing the condition of human life, that the events of things are unknown to us. Such a disposition, in a state liable to infinite vicissitudes, is followed with great advantages, whereas a clear foresight of the whole issue and result of things, and of every scene through which we are to pass, would be attended with innumerable inconveniencies, and have consequences very fatal to religion, and to the peace of our own minds. If a man, for instance, could certainly say in his flourishing circumstances, as David did presumptuously, that he should never be moved, but enjoy an uninterrupted course of affluence and worldly honour,
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he would probably be elated with pride, and give larger scope to his luxury : while the uncertainty of the highest stations, and the variety of unforeseen accidents that may reverse his fortune, checks the insolence of prosperity, and suppresses vain imaginations ; and is a perpetual incentive to frugality, moderation, and other social virtues. On the other hand, were he sure that his miseries were remediless, and the difficulties in which he is involved insuperable, the gloomy prospect would quite dispirit him, enfeeble his resolution, indispose him for the duties of religion, and a regular discharge of the common offices of life : in many cases, it is very probable, it would impair the health and disorder the understanding, as it must, in all, be a most effectual bar to industry, arts, and ingenuity. But as the world is now governed, and we see only the past and present, but not the chain of events that are before us, the most afflicted may support themselves with the hope of better times to come ; and this must be a considerable relief to their cares, and keep them from sinking under the weight of their sufferings, which would otherwise be grievous

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ous indeed, and intolerable. In such a situation, where so great a part of the scene is wrapt up in darkness, and what is concealed from us may be so often varied, our duty lies plain and obvious to every capacity : and the sum of it is, that we take care that riches, ease and plenty do not make us luxurious and dissolute, nor high-minded and arrogant ; nor adversity, irresolute and desponding ; but that we maintain a constant equanimity and steadiness of temper, an unruffled patient spirit, and a humble calm resignation to providence : firmly believing that amidst the present seeming confusions, and strange revolutions that happen in human affairs, all is conducted with unerring wisdom, and by invariable rules of righteousness and goodness ; and directing our views forward, with delight and thankfulness, to the world of perfect peace and bliss unchangeable, in which there shall be “ no more sorrow, nor pain, nor death,” but we shall be exalted to a higher rank of existence, and be made like “ unto the Angels of God.”

S E R M O N XV.

ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.

I CORINTHIANS xi. 24.

This do in remembrance of me.

THE partaking of the Lord's Supper is not a duty of itself; or a duty apparent to us from the nature of things: but a duty made such to Christians, by the positive institution of Jesus Christ.

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All positive duties, or duties made such by institution alone, depend entirely upon the will and declaration of the person who institutes or ordains them, with respect to the real design and end of them, and consequently, to the due manner of performing them.

It is plain, therefore, that the nature, the design, and the due manner of partaking of the Lord's supper, must of necessity depend upon what Jesus Christ, who instituted it, hath declared about it.

It is of small importance, to christians, to know what the many writers upon this subject, since the time of the evangelists and apostles, have affirmed; much less can it be the duty of christians to be guided by what any persons, by their own authority, or from their own imaginations may teach, concerning this duty.

The passages in the New Testament, which relate to this duty, and they alone, are the original accounts of the nature and end of this institution; and the only authentic declarations, upon which christians in later ages can safely depend: being written by the immediate followers of our
Lord;

Lord; those who were witnesses themselves to the institution; or were instructed in it, either by those who were so, or by Christ himself; and who consent in delivering down one and the same account of this religious duty.

Now if we compare all the passages in the New Testament, which give an account of this institution, we shall find, that the general sense of them may be thus expressed. "Take, and eat, this
"bread now broken: which I call my
"body, at this time considered by me as
"actually given, broken, and deprived of
"life, for your good; though not yet done,
"as you certainly know, who now see me.
"But I now give you this bread, and call
"it my body, in order to shew you that
"you are to take and eat bread, in this
"manner, after my death; and to introduce
"my command to you, to do this; to break
"and eat bread, in remembrance of me,
"and of my body broken, after it shall be
"broken, and after I shall be removed
"from you. In like manner, drink ye all
"of this cup, that is, of the wine in it,
"which I now call my blood, though I
"have not yet shed it; in order to shew
"you that you are to drink of wine, in this
this

“manner, in remembrance of my blood,
“after it shall be shed for your good, and
“the good of many others, whose sins shall
“be forgiven according to the terms of my
“gospel. Upon this account I now call
“this cup, that is, this wine, my blood
“of the new covenant, as it is to be drunk
“by you hereafter in remembrance of my
“blood, shed by me, in testimony to the
“truth of all that I have declared as the
“will or covenant of God; containing
“what he promises on his part, and what
“he requires all believers to undertake,
“on their part. And for the same reason,
“I call this cup, or this wine, the new
“covenant in my blood; because you are
“hereafter thus to drink wine in a religious
“remembrance of my blood, in, or through
“which, after it shall be shed, this new
“covenant will be confirmed, as by a seal
“or testimony to the truth of it; in order
“to assure you the more undoubtedly of
“the remission of your sins, stipulated in
“that covenant, upon true repentance and
“amendment. When therefore, you shall
“meet together, as my disciples, after I
“shall be taken from you, drink ye all of
“wine, for this purpose, perform this ac-
“tion, in memory of my blood thus shed
for

“for you : and, as often as ye shall meet
“to drink wine, professedly for this pur-
“pose ; take care that ye always do it,
“not as drinking at a common meal, but
“in a religious remembrance of me.”

It appears from hence that the end for which our Lord instituted this duty, was the remembrance of himself ; that the bread, to be taken and eaten, was appointed to be the memorial of his body broken ; and the wine to be drunk, was ordained to be the memorial of his blood shed : or, (according to the express words of St. Paul) that the one was to be eaten, and the other to be drunk, in remembrance of Christ ; and this to be continued, until he, who was once present with his disciples, and is now absent, shall come again.

Whoever therefore, in a serious and religious sense of his relation to Christ, as his disciple, performs these actions of eating bread and drinking wine, in remembrance of Christ, most certainly performs them agreeably to the end of the institution declared by Christ himself, and his immediate disciples.

Christians, meeting together for religious worship ; and eating bread and

drinking wine, in remembrance of Christ's body and blood, and in honour to him; do hereby publicly acknowledge him to be their master, and themselves to be his disciples: and, by doing this in an assembly, own themselves, with all other christians, to be one body or society, under him the head; and consequently, profess themselves to be under his governance and influence; to have communion or fellowship with him, as head, and with all their christian brethren, as fellow-members of that body of which he is the head.

Having given this plain account of the nature of this christian rite, it may not be improper to take some notice of that passage in St. Paul's epistle to the Corinthians which has so often been misunderstood, and applied to serve the purposes of superstition. The ill behaviour of the Corinthians, which the Apostle censures, consisted in their joining the Lord's Supper to a meal, or preceding entertainment, of quite another sort; in which they both eat and drank to please their appetites, in such a manner as to distinguish themselves from their poor and needy brethren; and to render themselves
unfit

unfit to partake afterwards of the Lord's supper in a worthy manner. And the Apostle's main design was first to shew them the proper manner of performing that duty of their religion, for which they professedly assembled; and then to persuade them rather entirely to leave off these feasts, at their assemblies; and to eat and drink for the common uses of life, at their own houses; than to go on in so indecent and inexcusable a behaviour, at a time, and in places, when and where they met together, as christian brethren, for the purposes of their holy religion. And this he does, in the most effectual manner, from the time, the words, and the design, of the institution of this rite: which the Apostle plainly represents as a rite wholly distinct from the Paschal Supper; instituted by our Lord, not during that Supper, but after it; and designed peculiarly for the direction of his followers in that one particular manner of religiously commemorating his death till his coming again. From hence it is, that the Apostle draws all that he says, in order to convince them of their ill behaviour; and of the necessity of a better practice: instructing them, in this easy way,

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that the Lord's supper had no natural connexion, or relation, to any other feast, or entertainment for the satisfaction of their bodily appetites; that this end was to be answered better by eating and drinking in their own private houses; and that it was their duty to consider the Lord's Supper, as a religious rite, of a very different nature from their common feasts; and a rite, at which their behaviour ought to be such as was suitable to the good and serious end it was designed for.

These were the lessons St. Paul chose to draw from the institution itself, for the peculiar use of the Corinthian christians, in the first age of the gospel.

The examination which St. Paul recommends when he says, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of this bread," appears from the tenor of his discourse to be a christian's examination of his own heart and disposition, by the institution of this holy rite, in order to assure himself that he comes to the Lord's Supper, and will behave himself at it, not as a common meal, or an ordinary eating and drinking; but as a particular rite appointed by Christ: that is, that he comes to it, in order to eat this bread and
drink

drink of this wine, in a serious and religious remembrance of him, and of his death.

The mention made here of examination, was entirely owing to this, that some of the Corinthian christians, had deviated, in their practice, from the institution of Christ; and behaved themselves so intemperately and indecently, as to make no distinction between the eating and drinking in memory of their master; and their eating and drinking indecently at a common meal. When therefore, any sincere and serious believer in Christ has approved himself to his own conscience in this particular, that he comes to the Lord's supper, as his disciple, with a temper and design suitable to the only end of its institution; he may be certain that he has examined himself in that sense, in which alone the Apostle has recommended this duty, with regard to the partaking of the Lord's supper.

An examination of a man's whole life and conduct, by the known law of God, whether natural or revealed, if it be wholly in order to render himself more perfect in the practice of all that is praiseworthy, in every circumstance and rela-

tion of life, must be of great use to every well-disposed Christian. But for this, every one is the best judge for himself, of the proper and most convenient time. My design is only to observe here, that self-examination, in this extent, is not a duty necessarily previous to the Lord's supper; nor spoken of, by St. Paul, in this degree, as necessary to our duly partaking of it. And this is fit to be observed; that so no serious christian may, on the one hand, make it a pretence for his not coming to this religious rite, that he has not had time for a long and particular examination into his whole past conduct; or, on the other hand, be uneasy (as too many have been) at his honest performance of this duty, in remembrance of their Lord and Master, without such a long and particular examination.

The duty of preparation for the holy communion being entirely founded upon these few words of St. Paul's "Let a man examine himself;" it is evident that the preparation implied in these words, as necessary and sufficient, is such a consideration of the institution itself, as may satisfy and assure us that we come to the
Lord's

Lord's supper, as his sincere disciples, resolved to eat and drink, in a religious remembrance of him; or, with dispositions and a behaviour, worthy of, that is, suitable to, the design of this holy rite.

A true christian needs not any length of time to assure his heart of this. Neither can the opportunities of this solemnity come so suddenly upon him, but that he may certainly know himself to be prepared, in this absolutely necessary sense: and let it be remembered that I am now speaking only of what is absolutely necessary. This is not designed to insinuate, nor does it in the least imply, that christians may not wisely chuse to spend a longer time in religious consideration and prayer, just before their coming to the communion; if they have leisure, and think it of more advantage to them to do it upon this occasion, than upon any other. But again I say, this ought not to be inculcated upon them, as a preparation necessary before their coming to this holy rite: lest the want of so much more time should either prevent their attendance upon this duty; or disturb the minds of those who have honest-

ly, and with christian affections, attended upon it, without such a previous conduct. It is, and must be, always of great use to christians. But we are not to confound duties; and make that peculiar to the holy Communion, which never was made peculiar to it by Christ, or his Apostles; which is proper for every season of our time, and every part of our life; and which would have been equally a duty, whether it had pleased our Lord to institute the Holy Communion, or not.

It is farther evident, from the passage now before us, that the whole affair of eating and drinking unworthily, in St. Paul's sense, is confined to the frame of our minds, and our behaviour, at the time of our performance of this religious duty.

Whoever therefore, eats this bread, and drinks this wine, with a serious and christian frame of mind; and a behaviour suitable to the design of the institution; partaking of it, as a sincere disciple of Christ, under the sense of his own strict obligations, as such; remembering his body broken, and his blood shed, at the same time; and doing the whole in remembrance of Christ, as his Lord and Master; certainly cannot possibly be said
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to eat and drink unworthily; or, as far as this particular religious action is concerned, to behave himself unsuitably to it, or to his own character, as a christian.

He only ought to be affrighted at the words of St. Paul, because he only can, in the Apostle's sense, be said to eat and drink unworthily, who, without considering the duty he professes to perform; without a serious regard to the remembrance of his Lord and Master, for which only it was commanded; eats this bread and drinks this wine, either with no thought at all of the end of this institution; which is one degree of doing it unsuitably to the nature of the thing; or, (which is worse) with thoughts and behaviour, utterly inconsistent with the design of this holy rite, or with a christian's duty at any time.

He who performs this particular religious duty, in a manner, and with a temper and behaviour, suitable to the nature and design of it; with a serious remembrance of Christ, as his Lord and Master, who has a right to the obedience of his life; cannot be said to eat and drink unworthily in St. Paul's sense; nor ought to be afraid of the censure passed by him

upon such as do so. But it will not follow from his doing this one duty worthily, that he is that good christian, in all respects, whom his Lord will reward at the last day. Nor will it follow from a person's past failures in other points of duty, that he partakes of the Lord's Supper unworthily, in St. Paul's sense; if his temper and behaviour, at the time of partaking, be suitable to it; and worthy of a true christian. For if this were the case; no one who had been once a wilful sinner could ever partake of this rite otherwise than unworthily: no, not if he could be certain that he should never again, under any possible trials, wilfully transgress the law of God, thro' his whole life; of which yet it is impossible for any christian to be assured.

What is here said cannot encourage sinners of any sort, to place the least hope in their partaking of the Lord's supper, whilst they continue in the practice of their sins; because this continuance in sin is itself the forfeiture of God's favour; and must end in their condemnation, according to the express terms of the gospel. But it is indeed of the contrary tendency, that is, to bring them to attend

tend upon this institution, with such a serious frame of mind as may happily lead them to the forsaking of all their sins, and a total amendment of life. For a person who is a sincere believer, and partakes of the communion in remembrance of Christ as his Master, must, in consequence of this, be sensible of the necessity of a christian behaviour; and of an universal obedience to this Master: and cannot therefore, be accounted guilty of a crime, in thus partaking of it. But supposing him not to be guilty of eating and drinking unworthily, in the strict original sense of those words; and not to be condemned by Almighty God, upon this account: yet, if he still goes on in his sins; the habitual wickedness of his life, and his own wilful neglect to reform and amend it, is the most certain and unavoidable condemnation, pronounced against him by that very Saviour whom he commemorates in this rite.

On the whole, we see, that the essence of this duty consists in the remembrance of Christ. It must however be observed, that the believing in him, and professing ourselves, his disciples and followers, is not only necessary, in the nature of the things, to-

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wards

wards this remembrance; but this remembrance, by partaking of bread and wine as memorials of his body and blood, is itself a professed communion or fellowship with him, as our head: and the doing this, in a body or society, is a professed communion or fellowship with all other members of the same body, or society, under Christ. Faith in Christ, therefore, as sent into the world by God, is the ground of this remembrance. Professing ourselves to belong to him, in a religious sense, as members to the head in a natural sense, is implied in it. And professing ourselves to have a relation to all other christians, (as members in the natural body have to one another,) and to have that mutual real concern and affection which results from such a relation amongst disciples to the same Master, is likewise implied in it; according to St. Paul's reasoning.

It is therefore an employment very proper, and very agreeable to this institution, to revive in our minds, upon this occasion, the force of all those arguments upon which we believe in Christ; to own ourselves his disciples; to confess, and heartily condemn, all our deviations from
his

his laws, and precepts; to acknowledge before God our obligations to live as his disciples, who expect to be happy upon his terms only; to express our sincere thankfulness for his doctrine, example, life, and death; to profess our dependence upon him, as our only Head; and lastly, to revive and enlarge our affectionate union and sympathy with all other members of the same body throughout the world.

A serious christian cannot better employ his time, upon this occasion, than in reviving in his own mind the proper thoughts upon these subjects, in such manner, as to have the best effect upon himself, in the whole conduct of his life. For I must observe that, though the performance of this one duty in a manner not unworthy of it, or unsuitable to it, be the great point to be necessarily regarded, at the very time of our attendance upon this holy institution; yet, the nature of the thing itself, consider'd in all it's circumstances, directs the mind of a christian to many thoughts; which, though not absolutely necessary to the performance of the duty, are of the greatest importance to himself: and may thus
 prove,

prove, by its own tendency and good effect upon a moral agent, not only an act of obedience to his Lord's command; but a means, leading to his own greater increase in all that is worthy of a man, and a christian.

Our faith in Christ cannot be improved, but either by God's giving us new evidences of the truth of his pretensions which we cannot expect; or by our own serious review and repeated consideration of all the old ones: and this review cannot be more properly taken, than when we profess ourselves, by a solemn act of his appointment, to be his disciples, or believers in him. Our thankfulness cannot be heightened, but by the reviving in our minds the memory of the benefits we have received; which are the only grounds of thanksgiving: and we are very properly led to these, when we are celebrating the great instance of God's love to mankind, in his Son Jesus Christ. Our charity to all others can never be more effectually improved, or inflamed, than when we take our obligations to it from the love of God to ourselves, shewn forth in the commemoration of the death
of

of Christ; and from our being all united in one body, under him our Head.

If we now proceed to enquire, what those privileges or benefits are, which are truly and certainly annexed to this duty, or implied in it, the answer I think, is; all that either in general are promised or naturally belong, to a sincere obedience to any positive commands of God, known by us to be such; or, in particular, are, in the nature of the thing itself, implied in this rite, or result from it: any of those promises which attend upon all duties of the like sort; or any of those natural consequences from this particular duty, which may be considered as the promises, in effect, of him who made it a duty. Thus, for instance, all that favour, and acceptance, and good pleasure, of Almighty God, which are plainly promised and annexed to our assembling ourselves in obedience, and in honour, to him and his authority, may as certainly be expected from our assembling for the purposes of this institution, as for other religious purposes. We may be sure, we are pleasing Almighty God, whilst we are obeying the command of his Son; and performing what we esteem
our

our duty: and this we ought to look upon as a great happiness.

But in this particular instance of our duty, we can with reason go farther. I say with reason: because the benefits received, from all such performances, by reasonable creatures, cannot possibly be received, but in a reasonable way. These duties, how well soever performed, cannot be supposed to operate as charms; nor to influence us, as if we were only clock-work, or machines, to be acted upon by the arbitrary force of a superior Being. But, in the natural and reasonable tendency of them we ought to found our main expectations: unless we are otherwise directed by God himself. And if we do; we shall find that, by our partaking of the Lord's Supper, according to the nature and design of it, we profess ourselves Christ's disciples; and acknowledge our obligation to live according to his laws: that by this we are led to a serious consideration of the tenor and design of his holy religion; and to the sincerest thankfulness for all that he did and suffered for us; as well as to the most proper dispositions and resolutions of behaving ourselves as becomes us; in
our

our relation to him as our Head, and to our brethren as fellow-members with us of the same body. This is therefore, an effectual acknowledgment of our strict obligation to all instances of piety, and virtue. And thus, by its own tendency, it leads our thoughts, and consequently our practice, to all that is good, and to all that is necessary for us to ask of God, or to act ourselves, towards our advancement in it. So that our attendance upon this rite is not only the paying a religious service, in the way appointed by Christ; which cannot but be always favourably accepted by God: but it is a doing that, which we ourselves can see to tend naturally to revive and keep alive in our minds all such thoughts, dispositions, and affections, as are proper to work upon the conduct of our whole lives.

And what reasonable creature would not be content with benefits of this sort, which are always of substantial and lasting service; without fancying to himself privileges, communications, or impressions, from above, of another sort, never expressly promised to this duty; never with certainty to be rightly judged of in any case; often fallacious; and always
leaving

leaving the mind, in which the images of them have been worked up, in a state satisfied with what carries no rational satisfaction in it; and too often in a disposition of thinking meanly of those real and practical excellencies, which are the true heights, and exalted accomplishments, of the christian life?

To say that this communion is the actual partaking of all the benefits of Christ's body broken and blood shed; or, in other words, of his living and dying for our good; is not only to put that upon one single act of religious obedience, which is by our blessed Lord made to depend upon the whole system of all virtues united: but, in the present case, has this peculiar absurdity in it, that in this rite, which was instituted for the remembrance of Christ, it destroys that very notion of remembrance, which is the essence of it. The great design of this institution is to call to remembrance the death of Christ; and, what is implied in this, to commemorate the benefits accruing to christians from it. To make it therefore, the actual partaking of these benefits, is altering the nature of it; as much as the actual partaking
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of any thing, is different from remembering it, or calling it to mind.

To call it the food of our souls, is not to give it a name peculiarly proper to this duty, as distinct from all others. The word of God, and the doctrine of Christ, are expressly represented under the notion of our food, that is, the food of our souls: as they tend to improve us in what he requires of us, and to nourish us unto eternal life. And so may prayer, and so may this rite, be called by a strong figure of speech; and so may every thing else, which leads us to a life of virtue: every step of which may be stiled, by the same figure, the nourishment and strength of our souls, towards a farther improvement.

The same sort of mistake seems to lie in calling it the renewal of the new covenant, on our part; and the seal of it, on God's part: the former of which is a very improper description of this duty, as distinguished from all others; and the latter seems to have no foundation, in any sense.

We may indeed, be said to acknowledge, and own our covenant with God,
through

through Christ, by the virtual professing ourselves to be christians, implied in our remembering him as our Lord, in this rite. But the same may be said of any other, even verbal, profession of our faith in Christ; which is equally an acknowledgment of the same covenant. But the repeated acknowledgment of our being entered into such a covenant is by no means, nor in any proper sense, the renewal of that covenant. They are two very different ideas: and ought always to be kept so.

Nor is this rite the seal of the covenant on God's part. The real blood of Christ, as shed for us; or, in other words, his death, is the only seal of the covenant: and even his blood, is called so, in this figurative sense alone; that is, that, as covenants amongst men are signed by some peculiar mark or seal, in order to shew and prove their truth and validity: so Christ's death, or Christ's blood, considered as the proof he voluntarily gave that the terms brought by him to mankind from God, were truly what he had represented them to be, is by a figure of speech called the seal of the new covenant; and he may be said to have sealed
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it with his blood, as his death was the strongest proof he could give of the reality of his own and of his father's affection towards mankind.

When Christ said of the cup, at the institution of this rite, "This is my blood of the new covenant;" he did not mean that real blood which was to be shed, in witness to this covenant: but wine to be drunk in remembrance of that blood. And, if the words were as St. Luke and St. Paul relate them, "This is the new covenant in, (or through) my blood;" he did not mean that the cup was to be that covenant, but a memorial of that covenant then to be sealed with his blood. But in neither of these expressions can it be implied that this rite is itself a repeated seal of that covenant; or any thing more, than that the wine at the Lord's table is the memorial of that blood which may be figuratively called the seal of that covenant; and, in consequence of this, the memorial of that covenant itself, to the reality of which Christ's blood was the seal, or testimony.

I have thus endeavoured to guard you against all such doctrines and ways of expression concerning this duty,

duty, as appeared to carry along with them any notions which might prove of bad consequence to christians ; or at best do not tend to explain the peculiar nature of it, as distinguished from all other duties of religion. And from what I have laid down I think it very evident that the proper and consistent way of expression, upon this subject, is this : “ that
“ partaking worthily of the Lord's Sup-
“ per is one particular duty of a christi-
“ an ; that this partaking of it worthily
“ is no more than the performance of
“ one duty, in a manner, and with dis-
“ positions, suitable to the design and
“ nature of it ; and therefore ought not
“ to be accounted of any more impor-
“ tance towards the securing our ac-
“ ceptance with God, than the perfor-
“ mance of a single duty of this sort can
“ be : and that every christian is obliged
“ not only to perform this duty worthily,
“ but every other duty of his religion
“ upon principles suitable to its nature ;
“ and, as to his final acceptance with
“ God through Christ, ought to have his
“ eye constantly and particularly upon
“ that whole system of moral duties, up-
“ on which, throughout the New Testa-
“ ment,

“ment, his acceptance is constantly re-
“ed; and upon those catalogues of vices
“which are as constantly there declared
“to exclude all who practise them from
“the kingdom of heaven, let their reli-
“gious performances in other respects,
“be what they will.”

To conclude, let christians be content with what their Master and his Apostles have taught them to expect from this duty; and not think it any exaltation of his institution, to magnify it into what he never designed it to be. Let them not esteem that, as a low dispensation, which is as high as it was his will to make it; nor think, above what is written, of that, which can receive its value only from what is written. Let them remember that all beyond, is no better than a dream: pleasing perhaps at present; but, in the end, hurtful to those who infuse it into others, and to those who will find themselves disappointed when they are waked out of it. Let them attend upon this holy institution, as the commemoration of their Lord, the reviver and teacher of the purest religion in the world: and this will lead their thoughts to their happiness, by the way of their duty;
and

and disengage them from dwelling chiefly upon supernatural favours, and exalted privileges, where they are naturally and strongly called upon to think of their own indispensable obligations to "depart from all iniquity;" and to "practise all virtue;" that is, to have their "conversation such as becometh the Gospel of Christ," whom they thus acknowledge for their Master.

THE END.

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T H E
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